

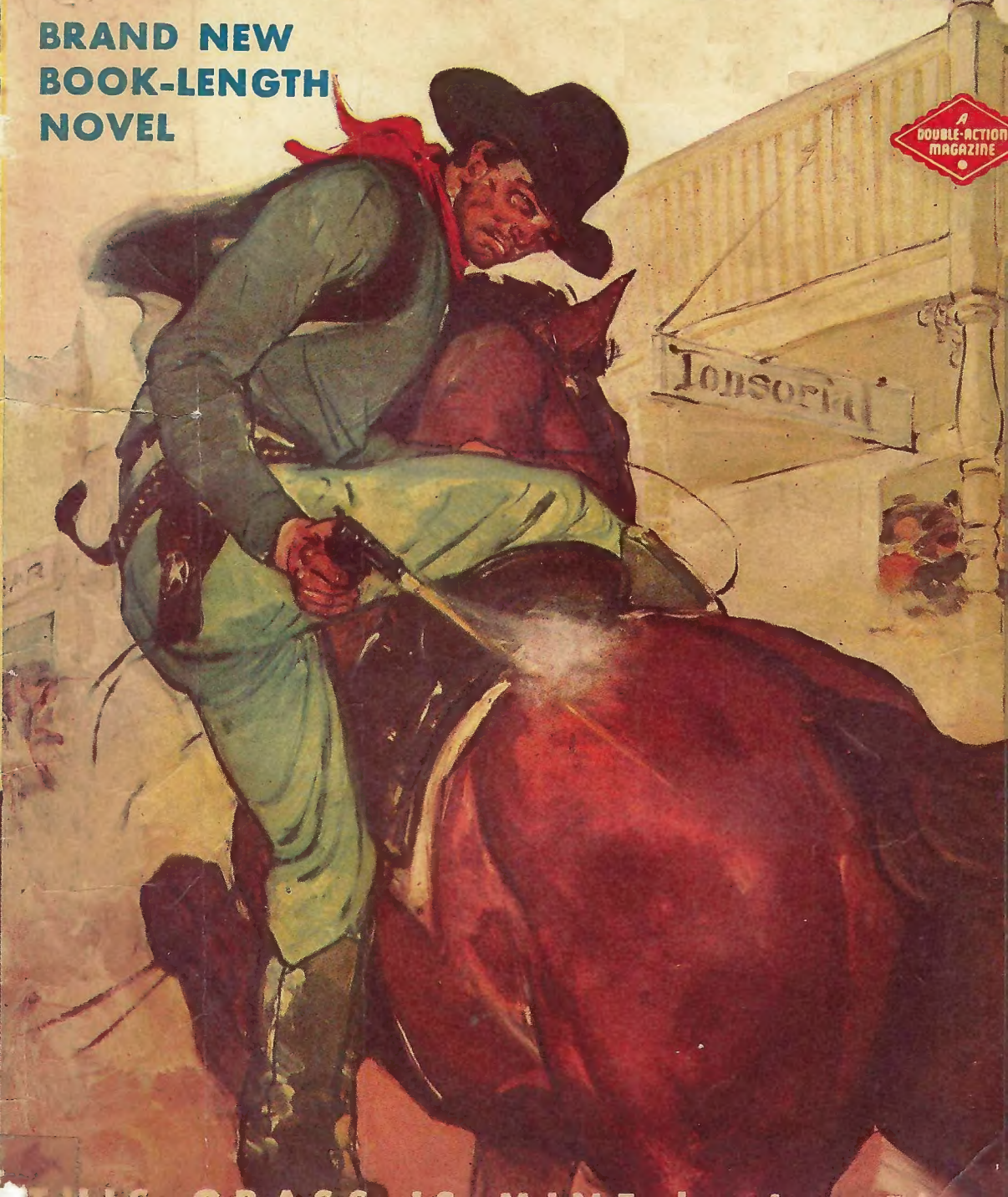
JULY

BLUE RIBBON

WESTERN

BRAND NEW
BOOK-LENGTH
NOVEL

A
DOUBLE-ACTION
MAGAZINE



ADVICE TO READERS:

who are suffering the miseries of

BAD SKIN

Stop Worrying Now About Pimples and Blackheads

and other externally caused skin troubles

JUST FOLLOW SKIN DOCTOR'S SIMPLE DIRECTIONS



SQUEEZING pimples or blackheads to get rid of them is a nasty, messy business—but that isn't the worst of it. Because doing so may also be injurious and leave your skin with unsightly, embarrassing blemishes. There is, now, a much easier, safer, cleaner way to help you rid your face of ugly, offensive, externally caused skin troubles. You merely follow a doctor's simple directions.

Good-Looking Skin Is Not for Women Only

You—yes, you—can have the same healthy, normal complexion free from externally caused skin troubles simply by giving your skin the special care that handsome screen stars give theirs. There's almost nothing to it—it is just about as easy as washing your face. *The whole secret consists of washing your face in a way that thoroughly cleanses the pores of every last speck of dirt and grime—something that ordinary cleansing may not do.* In fact, examination after examination shows that, usually, it is not a case of "bad skin" so much as a case of incomplete or faulty cleansing. What you should use is a highly concentrated soap like Viderm Skin Cleanser which penetrates the pores and acts as an antiseptic. When followed by a quick application of Viderm Medicated Skin Cream, specks of irritating dirt and grime are quickly washed out, they dissolve and disappear, leaving your skin clean, clear and free of the specks that often bring out pimples, blackheads and other externally-caused skin troubles.

It's Foolish to Take Bad Skin for Granted

It doesn't pay to risk marred skin, blotches, blemishes. Your very success in business, love and social life may depend upon your looks. *Handsoneness and a good appearance usually start with the condition of your skin.* Nobody likes a skin that looks unhealthy, unclean, abused, and marked with blackheads or pimples. **WOMEN ARE ATTRACTED TO MEN WHO HAVE SMOOTH,**

CLEAR, ROBUST-LOOKING SKIN Business executives don't choose men who have a poor-looking complexion. Don't take chances with your success in life when this inexpensive Viderm formula may help you.

Don't murder your skin! Here's all you have to do to keep it smooth and clear. Use Viderm Skin Cleanser when you wash your face. Rub the rich lather of this highly-concentrated soap on your face for just a few seconds and then rinse it off. Then apply a little Viderm Medicated Skin Cream and that's all there is to it. Viderm Medicated Skin Cream quickly disappears, leaving your skin nice and smooth. This simple treatment, used after shaving, helps heal tiny nicks and cuts, relieves razor-burn and smarting, besides conditioning your skin.

Give Your Face This Treat for 7 Days

Stop worrying and being embarrassed over what may happen to your skin. Just send for your Viderm Double Treatment this minute, and be confident that you will keep a smooth and clear complexion. Follow the simple directions, written by a doctor, that you will get with your Viderm Double Treatment; then look in your mirror and listen to your friends admire your smooth, clear skin—the kind that women go for.

Just mail your name and address to The New York Skin Laboratory, 206 Division Street, Dept. 140, New York City 2, New York. By return mail you will receive both

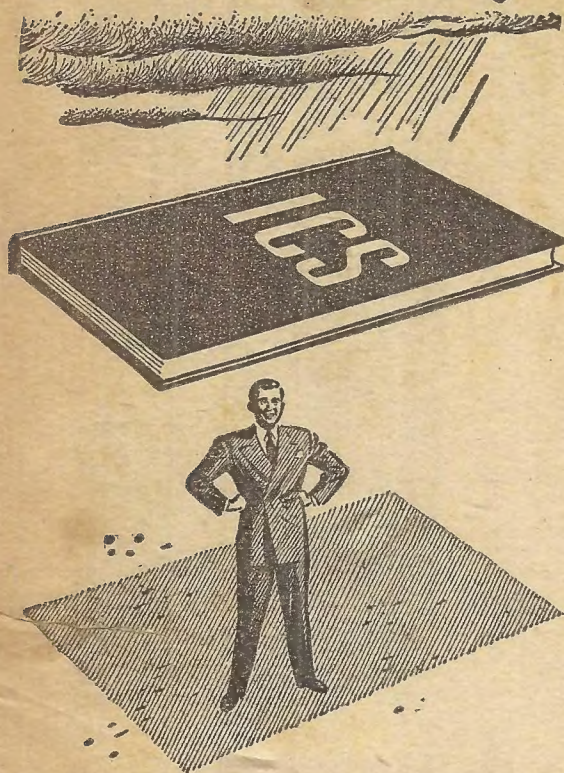
of the Viderm formulas, complete with full directions, and packed in a safety-sealed carton. On delivery, pay two dollars plus postage. If you wish, you can save the postage fee by mailing the two dollars with your letter. Then, if you aren't thrilled with results, your money will be cheerfully refunded. Remember that both of the formulas you use have been fully tested and proven, and are reliable for you. If they don't help you, your treatments cost you nothing. After you have received your Viderm, if you have any questions to ask concerning abused skin, just send them in.

DON'T DO THIS!



Don't murder your skin by squeezing it. Skin is delicate. When you break it, you leave yourself wide open to miseries. It's far easier, far safer, to let the Double Viderm treatment help you enjoy a handsome, clear and blemish-free complexion.

PREPARE NOW for "a rainy day"



FORTUNE-TELLING is *not* one of the attributes of I. C. S. We're much more concerned with helping those who need specialized training. For, regardless of what the future may bring, *trained men* will continue to hold the important positions in business and industry.

That's why we strongly recommend that you prepare yourself now for changes that may threaten your occupational status. In periods of uncertainty, *training is your best protection.*

I. C. S. can help you acquire much of the technical knowledge you need. Courses cover more than 400 commercial and industrial subjects. You study in your spare time . . . set your own pace . . . progress just as fast as your abilities and ambition permit.

Don't delay your program for self-advancement. Clip and mail this coupon TODAY. It will bring you full particulars about the courses in which you are interested.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS



BOX 6000-B, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me full particulars about the course *before* which I have marked X:

Air Conditioning and Plumbing Courses
☐ Air Conditioning
☐ Heating ☐ Plumbing
☐ Refrigeration ☐ Steam Fitting

Chemistry Courses
☐ Chemical Engineering
☐ Chemistry, Analytical
☐ Chemistry, Industrial
☐ Chemistry, Mfg. Iron & Steel
☐ Petroleum Refining ☐ Plastics
☐ Pulp and Paper Making

Civil Engineering, Architectural and Mining Courses

☐ Architectural Drafting
☐ Architecture
☐ Bridge and Building Foreman
☐ Building Estimating
☐ Civil Engineering
☐ Coal Mining
☐ Contracting and Building
☐ Highway Engineering
☐ Lumber Dealer
☐ Reading Structural Blueprints
☐ Sanitary Engineering
☐ Structural Drafting

☐ Structural Engineering
☐ Surveying and Mapping

Communications Courses
☐ Electronics
☐ Practical Telephony

☐ Radio, General
☐ Radio Operating
☐ Radio Servicing
☐ Telegraph Engineering

Electrical Courses
☐ Electrical Drafting
☐ Electrical Engineering
☐ Electric Light and Power
☐ Lighting Technician
☐ Practical Electrician

Internal Combustion Engines Courses

☐ Auto Technician ☐ Aviation
☐ Diesel-Electric
☐ Diesel Engines ☐ Gas Engines

Mechanical Courses
☐ Aeronautical Engineering
☐ Aircraft Drafting
☐ Flight Engineer
☐ Foundry Work
☐ Heat Treatment of Metals

☐ Industrial Engineering
☐ Industrial Metallurgy
☐ Machine Shop
☐ Mechanical Drafting
☐ Mechanical Engineering
☐ Mold-Loft Work
☐ Patternmaking—Wood, Metal
☐ Reading Shop Blueprints
☐ Sheet-Metal Drafting
☐ Sheet-Metal Worker
☐ Ship Drafting ☐ Ship Fitting
☐ Tool Designing
☐ Toolmaking
☐ Welding—Gas and Electric

Railroad Courses

☐ Air Brake ☐ Car Inspector
☐ Diesel Locomotive
☐ Locomotive Engineer
☐ Locomotive Fireman
☐ Railroad Section Foreman

Steam Engineering Courses

☐ Boilermaking
☐ Combustion Engineering
☐ Engine Running
☐ Marine Engineering
☐ Steam Electric ☐ Steam Engines

Textile Courses

☐ Cotton Manufacturing
☐ Rayon Weaving
☐ Textile Designing
☐ Woolen Manufacturing

Business and Academic Courses

☐ Accounting ☐ Advertising
☐ Arithmetic ☐ Bookkeeping
☐ Business Correspondence
☐ Business Management
☐ Certified Public Accounting
☐ Commercial
☐ Cost Accounting
☐ Federal Tax
☐ First Year College
☐ Foremanship ☐ French
☐ Good English ☐ High School
☐ Higher Mathematics
☐ Illustrating ☐ Motor Traffic
☐ Postal Service
☐ Salesmanship ☐ Secretarial
☐ Sign Lettering
☐ Spanish ☐ Stenography
☐ Traffic Management

Name _____ Age _____ Home Address _____

City _____ State _____ Present Position _____

Working Hours _____ A.M. to _____ P.M. Length of Service in World War II _____

Special tuition rates to members of the Armed Forces. Enrollment under the G.I. Bill of Rights approved for War II Veterans.
 Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada.

BLUE RIBBON WESTERN

Volume 9

July, 1947

Number 6

BRAND NEW BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

THIS GRASS IS MINE

..... By Lee Thomas 10

Ed Garlan knew the breed of men who ran the Beer Bottle brand, his neighbors — knew that Mack Colton was a gent who'd fight until he was either on top or under sod. And though he wanted to live at peace with Colton, he knew he wouldn't let Colton expand at his, Garlan's, expense!



SHORT STORIES

THE BULLET GAMBLER By Abel Shott 83

Powder Degnan was about to run the biggest bluff of his career.

LIGHTS OUT FOR BIG NOSE By Harry Van Demark 88

A fact story of the old West.

NEVER GIVE A SNAKE THE FIRST BITE

..... By Allan K. Echois 90

...because if you try to fight him on his own level, you have to be a snake yourself to beat him!

THE TRADING POST By The Pilgrim 104

True stories of the trails of yesterday.

ROBERT W. LOWNDES, Editor

BLUE RIBBON WESTERN, published bi-monthly by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices at 241 Church Street, New York 13, New York. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass. Entire contents copyright 1947 by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC. Single copy 15c; yearly subscription 90c. Manuscripts must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelope to insure return if not accepted, and while reasonable care will be exercised in handling them, they are submitted at author's risk. Printed in the U. S. A.



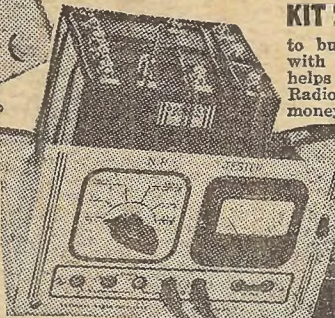
KIT 1 (left) I send you Soldering Equipment and Radio Parts; show you how to do Radio Soldering; how to mount and connect Radio parts; give you practical experience.

KIT 2 (left) Early in my course I show you how to build this N.R.I. Tester with parts I send. It soon helps you fix neighborhood Radios and earn EXTRA money in spare time.



VETERANS

You can get this training in your own home under G.I. Bill. Mail coupon for full details.



Be a RADIO Technician

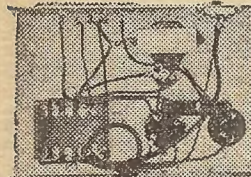
Learn by PRACTICING in Spare Time

KIT 3

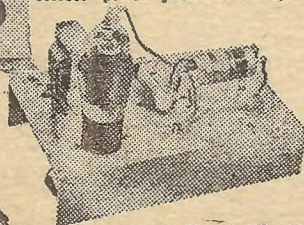
You get parts to build Radio Circuits; then test them; see how they work; learn how to design special circuits; how to locate and repair circuit defects.



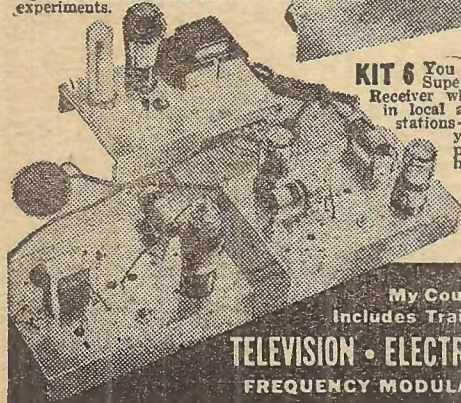
KIT 4 You get parts to build this Vacuum Tube Power Pack; make changes which give you experience with packs of many kinds; learn to correct power pack troubles.



KIT 5 Building this A. M. Signal Generator gives you more valuable experience. It provides amplitude-modulated signals for many tests and experiments.



KIT 6 You build this Superheterodyne Receiver which brings in local and distant stations—and gives you more experience to help you win success in Radio.



My Course includes Training in
TELEVISION • ELECTRONICS
FREQUENCY MODULATION

with BIG KITS of RADIO PARTS I send you

Do you want a good-pay job in the fast-growing Radio Industry—or your own Radio Shop? Mail the Coupon for a Sample Lesson and my 64-page book, "How to Be a Success in RADIO—Television, Electronics," both FREE. See how I will train you at home—how you get practical Radio experience building, testing Radio circuits with BIG KITS OF PARTS I send!

Many Beginners Soon Make Extra Money in Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll I start sending EXTRA MONEY JOB SHEETS that show you how to make EXTRA money fixing neighbors' Radios in spare time while still learning! It's probably easier to get started now than ever before, because the Radio Repair Business is booming. Trained Radio Technicians also find profitable opportunities in Police, Aviation, Marine Radio, Broadcasting, Radio National Radio Institute Manufacturing, Public Address work. Think of even greater opportunities as Television, FM, and Electronic devices become available to the public! Send for FREE books now!

FIND OUT WHAT NRI CAN DO FOR YOU

Mail Coupon for Sample Lesson and my FREE 64-page book. Read the details about my Course; letters from men I trained; see how quickly, easily you can get started. No obligation! Just MAIL COUPON NOW in envelope or paste on penny postal. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 7GA2, National Radio Institute, Pioneer Home Study Radio School, Washington 9, D. C.

Sample Lesson 64 Page Book **FREE**

Mr. J. E. SMITH, President
Dept. 7GA2, National Radio Inst.
Washington 9, D. C.

Mail me FREE Sample Lesson and 64-page book. (No salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

Are

Name

Address

City State

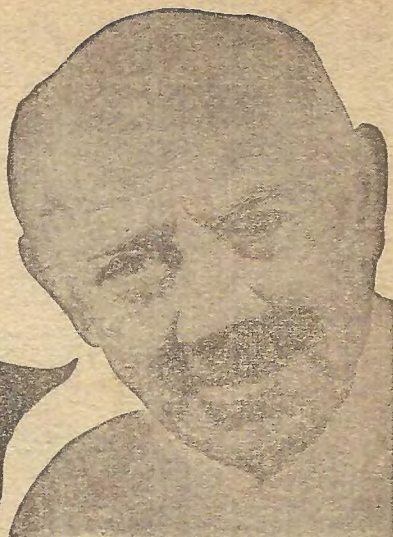
(Please include Post Office zone number)



Approved for Training under GI Bill

BE PROTECTED

in case of
SICKNESS OR ACCIDENT



NEW SECURITY PLAN

Pays **HOSPITAL & DOCTOR BILLS**

**SAFEGUARDS
ENTIRE FAMILY**

for only

3¢ A DAY
1½¢ FOR CHILDREN

**ANY HOSPITAL IN U. S.
CHOOSE YOUR OWN DOCTOR**

It's Now! It's Different! It's a real Security Plan . . . designed to give you the Protection you'll really need in case of Hospital confinement for sickness or accident. When misfortune strikes, you may go to any Hospital in the U. S. or Canada under any Doctor's care. WE PAY YOUR EXPENSES in full accordance with Policy provisions. You are assured of expert care and medical attention . . . without any worries whatever about heavy financial burden.

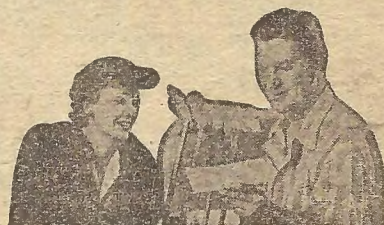
Individual or Family Eligible

Why is it that North American can offer so much useful coverage for so little money? Because this Protection is sold direct. Individuals or family groups can enroll from birth to age 70 and get such exceptional benefits as Doctor fees, weekly compensation for time lost from work, death benefits, etc. What's more, you're backed up by a strong, reliable Company operated under the full supervision of the Insurance Dept. This Plan has won the approval of Hospitals and Physicians throughout the U. S.

No Medical Examination

You are not required to take a medical examination to get North American Hospitalization Protection. Already over ten million persons in America have enrolled for this valuable kind of coverage . . . proving the practical common sense of protecting your savings from the onslaught of unexpected Hospital and Doctor bills. Send off at once for all the details about this Plan. No obligation. No Agent will call.

POLICY PAYS



Hospital Room and Board for Sickness or Accident	Per Day Up to	\$6.00
Doctor Visits In Case of Accident	Per Visit	\$3.00
Surgical Operations	Up to	\$150.00
Time Lost from Work In Case of Accident	Per Week	\$25.00
Accidental Death	Up to	\$2000.00
Physical Dismemberment	Up to	\$2000.00
Identification Service	Up to	\$100.00
Ambulance Service		\$10.00

NORTH AMERICAN MUTUAL INSURANCE CO.
Dept. D7-7, Wilmington, Del.

Please send me, without obligation, details about your "3c A Day Hospitalization Insurance Plan."

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

Mail Coupon **FOR FREE DETAILS**

IMAGINE THEIR JOY

WHEN THEY FOUND THEY COULD PLAY

This easy as A.B.C. way!



LEARNED QUICKLY AT HOME

"I didn't dream I could actually learn to play without a teacher. Now, when I play for people they hardly believe that I learned to play so well in so short a time."

*H. C. S., Calif.



INVESTMENT PAID BACK A THOUSAND FOLD

"Anyone with musical ability should make good with your course. My little investment paid back a thousand fold. I have been playing for 4 years now. Today I play in one of our top bands."

*J. M., San Juan, P.R.



PLAYS AT DANCES

"I have completed your course and your lessons have been most satisfactory. I can play all of the popular songs. I have also earned money playing at dances."

*E. N. J.,
New York



INVITED TO PARTIES

"I enjoyed taking this course and I get a lot of pleasure out of it. I have many invitations to play at parties. I owe you much for making this possible."

*K. U., N. Y.

Thousands Have Learned to Play Quickly, Easily At Home

WHAT instrument would you like to play? We'll show you how you can learn to play it—quickly, easily, in spare time at home for just a few cents a day! Never mind if you don't know one note of music from another—don't worry about "special talent."

The truth of the matter is that thousands now play who never thought they could! Yes, men and women everywhere are enjoying the thrilling satisfaction of playing the piano, violin, guitar, saxophone or other favorite instrument. Some of them are playing in orchestras and over the radio; others are teaching music, making

money in spare or full time. And thousands are playing for their own enjoyment and the entertainment of their friends.

It all came about when they wrote to the U. S. School of Music for the Free Booklet that shows you how **EASY** it is to learn music at home this modern way. No tedious scales, no tiresome exercises. You learn to play by playing—start right in almost at once with the melody of a simple tune! It takes only a few minutes a day and the cost is trifling; you save the expense of a private teacher. Does it sound too good to be true? Mail the coupon and get the **FREE PROOF!** (Our forty-ninth year—Est. 1898.) U. S. School of Music 1237 Brunswick Bldg., New York 10, N. Y.

NOTICE

Please don't confuse our method with any systems claiming to teach "without music" or "by ear." We teach you easily and quickly to play real music, any music, by standard notes . . . not by any trick or number system.

SEND TODAY → FOR COMPLETE DETAILS

• You'll open your eyes when you find how quickly and easily you can learn to play your favorite instrument. Don't doubt; don't hesitate. Send for the fascinating illustrated booklet that answers all your questions; let the free Print and Picture Sample show you how this method actually works. If interested, mail the coupon NOW.

*Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by professional models.

FREE! Print and Picture Sample

U. S. SCHOOL OF MUSIC

1237 Brunswick Bldg., New York 10, N. Y.
I am interested in music study, particularly in the instrument checked below. Please send me your free illustrated booklet, "How to Learn Music at Home."

Piano	Saxophone	Modern Elementary
Guitar	Trumpet, Cornet	Harmony
Hawaiian Guitar	Reed Organ	Clarinet
Violin	Tenor Banjo	Practical Finger
Piano Accordion	Mandolin	Control
		Other Instrument

Have your Instrument?

Name (Please Print)

Address

City State

NOTE: If you are under 16 yrs parent must sign coupon

Save 2c—Stick coupon on penny postcard.

BOOKS

FOR FUN
AND
PROFIT

Here are books that you will want to read and re-read for its entertainment and information. Books for every taste and need, and each one a good value. Select the books you want and mail the coupon NOW!

2500 JOKES For All Occasions

The best laughs from all over the world—collected in a single entertaining and useful volume. Tell these jokes at parties, entertainments, in after-dinner speeches—read them in your spare moments of relaxation, or chuckle over them with a friend. Grouped and indexed under 21 separate classifications, such as about lawyers, doctors—business or college jokes—stories about Hollywood and sports—Jewish, Negro, English, Scottish, etc.—even a special section of limericks and another of comic verse. The belly laugh, the sly retort, the broad satire, the infinitely A FIND AT varied humor of the American people—all are here in this one volume. 480 pages—hard cover, cloth bound—8½x5½ inches big—a real big book. **\$150**

FUN IN BODY BUILDING



Wouldn't YOU like to have a healthy, mighty, handsome body that women will admire and men envy? A powerful physique that can dish it out and take it too. Muscles of steel in your arms, legs, back—and every part of your body. New book, just published—"FUN IN BODY BUILDING" tells you simply and surely how you can change yourself into a Mighty Man! Shows you how to increase the size and power of your muscles, in very short time. Gives you COMPLETE COURSE OF EXERCISES, GUARANTEED TO ADD INCHES AND MIGHT TO EVERY PART OF YOUR BODY. Book also contains information on food, sleep, hygienic functions, anatomy, organs, etc. Price Complete **\$100**

Practical Lessons In HYPNOTISM

by Dr. Wm. Wesley Cook

Teaches you the best method of hypnotic practices. It is written in plain language, and all its statements are absolute facts and its illustrations are actual occurrences. This is a big 284 page book, complete and encyclopedic in its contents, which include the following chapters: History of Hypnotism—Qualifications of a Hypnotist—What Kind of a Subject—Favorable and Unfavorable Influences—Precautions to be Observed—How to Hypnotize—Degrees of Hypnosis— Clairvoyance—Self-Hypnotism and Auto Suggestion—The Hypnotist's Secret—Hypnotism and Disease—Hypnotism in Business and Society—Hypnotism in the Professions—Post Hypnotism—Awakening a Subject—Mind-Reading, Telepathy—Miscellany, etc. Hypnotism is today acknowledged to be an exact science. There is no restriction upon the acquisition of this knowledge. Its blessings and powers belong to all who desire and are willing to secure them. Special **\$200**



WANTED: A BABY

Only those who actually suffer from a barren marriage, can really understand the frustration and heartaches. (In certain extreme cases, the marriage itself may be wrecked by this cause.) In "YOU, TOO CAN HAVE A BABY" Dr. Abner I. Weisman gives a detailed explanation of the factors that may prevent normal reproductive functions; he offers simple and sound advice which oftentimes is all that is needed; also describes the methods medical science uses today to remove many of the obstacles to successful conception and childbirth. Other than in cases of actual physical incapability, this book should prove helpful. Also explains the anatomy and physiology of reproduction, how to test pregnancy, what constitutes sterility, how to test sterility of male and female, plan for parenthood, etc. Often barrenness is due to minor conditions which can easily be cleared away. Having a baby is truly life's greatest thrill. Price **\$198**

HOW TO DANCE



A simple guide to teach yourself to become a good dancer, easily and quickly. The authors give you all the fundamentals—rhythm, posture, balance, leading and following—and then take you step by step, through the various routines, until you can confidently and correctly dance the FOX TROT, WALTZ, RUMBA, CONGA, SAMBA, LINDY HOP and POLKA. A. end of book, there are "foot patterns" which you can out and use on the floor while learning and practicing the different steps. HOW TO DANCE is invaluable for both men and women, beginners or experienced dancers. Special for only **\$150**

HOW TO ORDER: Fill out coupon and mail today. All books guaranteed satisfactory, or money back at once. All books full size, beautifully printed, durably bound. If remittance enclosed, we pay postage. If C.O.D., sent plus postage. MONEY BACK GUARANTEE: If not completely satisfied for any reason, return books and get money back at once.

KNICKERBOCKER PUBLISHING CO., Dept. A-62,
120 Greenwich St., New York 6, N. Y.

IT'S FUN TO DRAW

A Complete Self-Instruction Course in 9 Divisions of Art



Anyone who has learned to write can learn to draw! This helpful book removes the mysticism that has surrounded art. By reducing the elements of drawing to its simple steps, it teaches THE BEGINNER to draw, and then to advance, into more difficult subjects. For the practiced artist, it is a source book and veritable mine of information. This book guides you from the first stroke on paper to selling the finished art work. Includes specific instruction, advice, tricks, on—Still Life, Animals, Human Figure, Art Anatomy, Faces and Portraits, Lettering, Layouts, Cartooning, Advertising and Commercial Art, Illustrations, Color in Art, etc., etc. Includes glossary of Art Terms, Supplies, Types of Work, Profusely illustrated with over 1000 SKETCHES and DRAWINGS. **\$100**
The price is only—SPECIAL

A SMALL BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN

By HAROLD S. KAHM

1000 Money Making Ideas for men and women of all ages. A timely and important book for people ambitious, looking forward to a better financial future. Edited by the foremost writer on small business enterprises. It includes: BE YOUR OWN BOSS (with 98 money making businesses described and explained), GET A CIVIL SERVICE JOB (how to go about getting a lifetime government job), BEST POSTWAR JOB OPPORTUNITIES (with information on the newest industries), A FARM OF YOUR OWN (how to buy and operate your own farm), START A MAIL ORDER BUSINESS (how to select a product, start, operate and expand a mail order business—with case histories), 200 SPARE TIME MONEY MAKING IDEAS (many ideas for everyone), etc., etc. PRICE **\$100**

The Dangerous Age of Man!

KNOW YOUR PROSTATE



Here is a most valuable book for the man over forty, who wants to know why his physical health, mental power and ability to sustain his drive and vigor of former years are waning. Inevitably, every man must become acquainted with The Prostate Gland—the usual cause of his difficulties. The information and advice given in this frank, simply written and authoritative book will save the average man years of uncertainty and misery. PART OF CONTENTS:—The Vital Importance of the Prostate; The Controller of All Activity; Men Also Have Change of Life; The Beginning of Old Age; Disorders of the Prostate; Advice on the Cure of Disorders—You can sleep well, the truth about Tobacco and Whiskey—Wisdom of Moderation. BRAND NEW BOOK. **\$200**

COME INTO MY PARLOR

By Charles Washburn

This is an authentic and intimate account of Chicago's notorious Everleigh Club conducted early in the century when a whole section of the city was open to many famous and wealthy men patronized this "gilded palace." The author formerly a Chicago newspaper man, in this Biography of the Aristocratic Everleigh Sisters, tells the inside story—describes "parties," names and gives colorful details of the aristocratic sisters and how they changed the "Joy of Life" into a pot of gold. It is swell reading from front door to back, with good stop-overs in between. — N. Y. Morning Telegraph. Special Only **\$200**

THE PLAYBOY'S HANDBOOK

Edited by W. A. BROOKS

The editor here offers for entertainment of his male readers what he believes to be the best stories and articles of this type. 5½x8½ inches, 192 pages, cloth-bound—and special **\$100**

KNICKERBOCKER PUB. CO., DEPT. A-62
120 Greenwich St., New York 6, N. Y.

Send me the books I have checked below. If not satisfactory I can return for full refund.

- () 2500 Jokes for All Occasions\$1.50
- () Fun in Body Building 1.00
- () Practical Lessons in Hypnotism 2.00
- () You Can Have a Baby 1.50
- () How To Dance 1.00
- () It's Fun To Draw 1.00
- () Small Business of Your Own 2.00
- () Know Your Prostate 2.00
- () Come Into My Parlor 2.00
- () The Playboy's Handbook 2.00

☐ I enclose \$.....in full payment.
☐ Send C.O.D. \$.....plus postage.

Name

Address

City & ZoneState.....

Don't Neglect Foot Itch

ATHLETE'S FOOT

... it may become DANGEROUS!



PEDILIN-This Wonderful, Tested Discovery

Paves The Way For New! Improved! Treatments!

Does your Athlete's Foot Itch drive you mad? Does that torturing itch compel you to hopelessly scratch away at your skin . . . only to find you have aggravated the condition? It has been estimated that anywhere from 50% to 90% of the people in this country are affected by this disease sometime during their lives. Now you, too, like thousands of other men and women may use PEDILIN — this amazing, new, scientific treatment for Athlete's Foot. You may not be aware that you are suffering from a mild case of Athlete's Foot at present.

USE PEDILIN - The New Foot Medicine

Special Formula Quickly Penetrates to Germs and Interferes with Its Spreading

The ingredients of PEDILIN were tested during the war on Navy Personnel, as well as others. The results of these tests indicated that one of the active ingredients of PEDILIN was more beneficial than many other treatments. This ingredient in this special formula helps interfere with the spreading of the Athlete's Foot germ. It takes fast action against the "hard-to-get-at" germs. Other ingredients of this formula help the badly affected skin.

Beware of these Symptoms

The symptoms of this disease at the start are small cracks between the toes and the peeling of the skin surrounding these cracks. Should you neglect your Athlete's Foot in its first stage, it may develop and spread throughout all your toes to the balls of your feet and arches. This is usually accompanied by an uncontrollable itching and scratching, which results in a badly, mutilated, ugly, infected condition of the skin.

Try PEDILIN NOW

A one month's supply costs you only one dollar. You would gladly pay much more than the small cost of this wonderful treatment to relieve yourself of the agonizing foot itching that interferes with your sleep, your work and social life. Don't miss this opportunity to help yourself with PEDILIN—medical sciences' sensational new discovery for the treatment of Athlete's Foot. Mail Coupon NOW!

UNIVERSAL SYNTHETICS, INC., Dept. DA-7
100 West 42nd St., New York 18, N. Y.

Here is my dollar! Rush to me a one month's supply of PEDILIN, the New Foot Medicine (ATHLETE'S FOOT TREATMENT).

Name

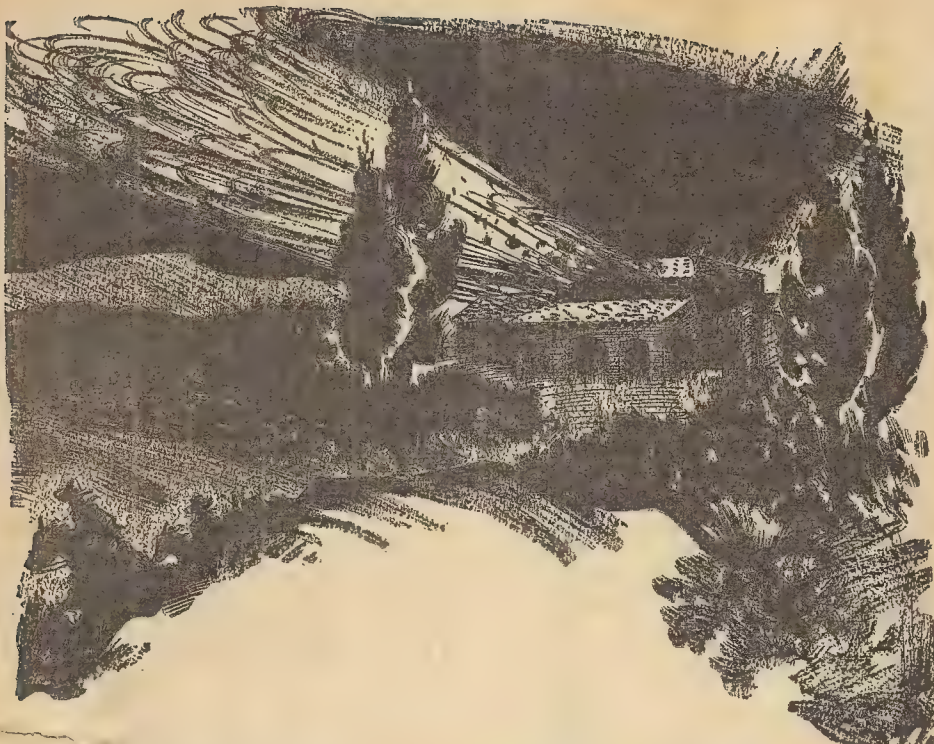
Address

City..... Zone..... State.....

THIS GRASS IS MINE



Ed Garlan was willing to live in peace with his neighbors. Mexican or renegade Americanos, for their past meant nothing to him. But greed was running strong here in this land, and though there was ample room for Garlan's horse rancho, his neighbors grudged him the grass, and he knew he would have to fight for it.



BRAND NEW BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL—COMPLETE
IN THIS ISSUE

By LEE THOMAS

CHAPTER I

THROUGH the driving December rain, horses were going across the border into *Baja California*. They trotted through the government gates at Tecate, spilling down through the rain into the town that lay in the valley, half-obsured in the downpour on this afternoon. They were trotting down Tecate's mainstreet and climbing into the southern hills.

Ed Garlan had hazed the leaders through town, mindful of the eyes of the residents who watched them from under the canopies of stores and business houses. The horses, spooky from days on the trail, had boogered at the sight of the town. Ed Garlan and his cowpunchers drove them hard, beating them with rain-soaked lassoes.

A ragged little Mexican had run out calling, "Gringoes, gringoes! Damn the gringoes!" He was about eight, Ed had figured. The big Americano had turned his horse toward the boy.

"Get off the street, *hijo*," he said sternly. "One of these broncs run over you and you'll eat no more *tor-tillas*." He spoke in fast Spanish.

The boy ran back to the sidewalk. "Gringoes," he called angrily.

Ed looked for a long moment at the mother and father who stood under the canopy. The mother was a squat, heavy Mexican with two more *muchachos* beside her. The father was a tall man with black *mustachios*.

"Your son has poor manners, hombre," he told the father.

Skinny Marsh had ridden out of the rain. "Ed, we got the leaders out in the foothills. About thirty miles

south of here, I reckon, and we hit Hacienda Creek. You follow the creek south for ten miles and you reach the outerfit, huh?"

Ed Garlan nodded. "You ramrod them out, Skinny. I'll ride back to the custom house and settle with the border patrol."

Skinny Marsh turned his pinto. He was a short man who weighed close to three hundred, and an ironic cowboy had once dubbed him as "skinny." The name and the fat both clung to Skinny Marsh. Ed Garlan watched him ride into the rain, then Ed turned and sent his bronc up the slope toward the custom house.

Ed Garlan was trailing broncs into trouble, and he was fully aware of that fact. *Americanos* were not welcomed in *Mejico*. Ed reined to one side as one of his Bar S cowboys rode up.

"Keep pushin' them, Hightail," he said.

Somewhere a stallion neighed. Horses were moving in the rain and somewhere a dog barked. The sound turned from a bark into a sharp yip. The yip ran out as the dog ran into the distance. Ed let a smile touch his lips. One Mexican dog had stopped the hoof of an American horse. That cur would have a momento whereby to remember the American horse herd.

He swung wide of another rider. For the most part, the herd was made up of bay mares—good stock from the Imperial valley and the mountains out of Escandido. Ed had raised them himself. The rest were mares he had purchased on the northern side of the line—a scatteration of sorrels, pintos and grays.

He rode to the custom-house. A slender Mexican, dressed in the ornate uniform of the Mexican border patrol, stood under the overhang of the roof on the adobe building, a box of matches in one hand. Every time a hundred horses trotted past, he transferred a match to the window sill beside him.

Ed did not break into the border man's count. He got down and went under the overhang. Here the rain did not hit him. He was a big man,

still in his twenties, and the yellow oilskin slicker did not hide the bulk of his muscular body. His jaw was square, covered with three days of whiskers, and his eyes were a light blue. He wore shotgun chaps and the heels of his bench-made boots were run over.

He walked to the high border fence and went through the gate to the American side. His men were funneling the herd out here, letting the mares trickle through the gate, thereby making it easier for the Mexican to count them. One lifted a hand to Ed who nodded back.

AN AMERICAN custom-officer squatted beside his office, safe from the rain by the canopy, and watched the herd.

"Nice horses, Ed."

"I think so, Tom."

Tom Bishop had known Ed for some time. They had gone to school together up in Indio. The border man shifted his weight to his other leg. He dug in his pocket and came out with a package of cigarets. He extended it toward Ed.

"The new-fangled kind, huh," said Ed. "Already rolled. Me, I always hit the durham, the kind you twist."

"That's one curse of civilization," said Tom Bishop. "I live an easy life, you live a hard one. I get a small salary and you own a couple of thousand head of mares."

"But you're not out in the rain," put in Ed.

Bishop looked at a pinto mare. "You're moving into trouble, Ed. They won't like you in Mexico. And then there's Morto and his bunch; rumor says when they get out of Central Mexico, they're coming north toward El Paso, then swing this way. They want to control Baja California."

"Part of the game," said Ed.

They had their cigarets going. Ed put his back against the wall and judged his smoke. "Not as good as durham," he said. He looked at the cigaret. "Mex brand, huh?"

"They smoke them strong there," supplied Tom Bishop. "How many more head you got, Ed? They been

going by here for over an hour."

Ed smiled. He threw the cigaret away and rolled some durham in a wheat-straw paper. "Not much more now."

Bishop said again, "There's danger down there, Ed."

"Put your cards out?"

Bishop jetted tobacco smoke from lean nostrils. "First, there's Morto. He's raisin' hell; you know that. He needs horseflesh for his army and he needs beef for his army. Of course, you aren't raising beef—that puts you clear there."

"Si."

"Then there's the Cerveza outfit. They're on Chamiso Crick, west of you. That's a tough spread."

"Mexicans?"

Bishop shook his head. "Not Mexicans, Ed. For the most part, the Mexicans are danged nice people—oh, sure, there's some skunks in them, but there are more skunks per bunch in the Americans than there are in the Mexes. No, they're renegade *Americanos*. Mack Colton runs the outfit."

Ed scowled. "That name's familiar. Ain't he the gent that lifted the money out of the El Centro bank a few years back. He ran an outfit up on the Colorado but when construction work started on the Canal, it drove him out of that section."

"We don't know whether he robbed that bank, Ed. Anyway, we got suspicions. Well, he's boss of the Cerveza iron. Cerveza means beer in Mex. and he runs a beer bottle as a brand. He runs cattle."

"Ain't he wanted in the States?"

"Not exactly. Anyway, he's in Baja California. We don't want him across the Line; he can stay down there. And there's Sean O'Henry."

"I know him," said Ed slowly. "We had a run-in out of Bishop, California, up in the Owens alley. I was ramroddin' old Ike Slattery's iron, the N Bar 5. Sean O'Henry ran a wagon for the outfit on the edge of Death Valley, the Lazy Y T. We got in a little argument over a steer. I said he had the wrong iron on him."

"Guns?"

"Never got that far." Ed looked at

his right fist suggestively. He didn't say any more. He didn't tell how they had fought for thirty minutes, there in that roundup camp in the desert. How, when it was over, Sean O'Henry lay in the sand, bloody and beaten. "He's got a bend in his nose, ain't he?"

"Yes, he has."

Ed grinned. "I put that there."

"Pinto Martinez rides with them, too."

Ed shook his head. "Never heard of him."

"Part Apache, part Mex. Worst blood of each race. You'll hear of him. He can separate a cow from her hide pronto, I hear. Reckon he never has eaten a piece of beef from a cow of the iron he runs. Always the neighbor's critter goes under his knife. And watch that breed's knife, Ed."

Ed was silent for some time, looking at the rain and the horses. "I was through here two months ago," he said. "You were over around National City then, I guess. I went through to Hacienda Crick and looked the spread over. Nice looking outfit and a good graze for horses. Guess it used to belong to an old Spaniard, Don Cortez de la Riviera. He died with no heirs and it went to the territorial government."

"Colton tried to buy it," said Tom Bishop. "But you outbid him, I guess. He didn't like that, either."

The last of the herd went by. Ed watched the horses trickle through the gate. He got to his feet. "See you again, Tom."

Tom Bishop joked, "Maybe."

"Not that bad." Ed Garlan grinned.

ED WALKED back across the Line, boots in the thick mud. One of his riders, Kid Harris, pulled in, looked down. "I'm cold, Ed."

"Java."

"Jave hell, *tequilla*."

"We'll get a drink," said Ed, "in a little while."

Harris rode to the Mexican custom house. The young official spoke in Spanish. "Count these." He handed the matches to Ed. "Add seventy-six head to that, *Americano*."

Ed counted the matches. There

were twenty-eight of them. The Mexican had counted two thousand, eight hundred and seventy-six head of his horses. "Should be twenty-nine hundred even," said Ed. "We left the Imperial Valley with a few head over that. We lost three head in Carrizo Gorge out of Jacumba in a rock slide. You take my count or do I take yours?"

The man smiled. "Mine is official."

Ed shrugged, grinned. "Won't argue, fellow."

They went into the office. Kid Harris sat his bronc outside, holding the reins of Ed's horse. Ed watched the man figure out the import duty on the horses and he made out a check on the El Centro bank. "If that'n ain't no good," he joked, "I'll make out another."

"You go to Hacienda Creek?"

Ed nodded.

"That is a good *rancho*, *senor*. *Senor de la Riviera* took great pride in his *rancho*. I understand the territorial government sold his cattle to the Cerveza brand and the money was turned over to the treasury in Mexico City. That is what a man gets by not marrying and raising any sons." The Mexican smiled at Ed. "But they could not accuse me of that. *Por Dios*, Lupe is to have her sixth baby and we have been married only seven years. I have the heirs, *no es verdad*, but nothing to leave to them."

"You're young," said Ed. "You'll drink *tequilla* for a long time yet."

The Mexican was looking out the dirty window. "The rain is stopping. That is the way it sometimes rains here. It comes all at once and rushes water down arroyos and then the rain is gone. That is one price one pays for living so close to the ocean."

"How far to the coast?"

"To Ensenada it is about twenty miles."

The last of the rain ran off the overhand. Already the sun was shining on the water-soaked adobe soil that was as slippery as wet marble. "You say I am young, *sí*. But Pancho Morto has a way of changing things in the government service. He does not like the present government officials. Perhaps some day you'll see

me ride into your camp on Hacienda Creek and want a job for protection."

"Why pick on us?"

"Morto will not like you, either. He does not like gringos—pardon me, *Americanos*—in Mexico."

Ed Garlan's face was sober.

CHAPTER II

ED AND KID HARRIS rode toward a *cantina*. The street was hoof-marked and rough behind the horse-herd. They rode at a walk, their shod horses sure-footed in the mud. Back of them, on the American side of the line, was the high lava ridge. Beyond that ridge was the Potrero Valley. To the west and the east were the *chamiso* covered hills, rough with boulders and ridges. This was a mountainous desert country. Mount Tecate was to the northwest, half in Mexico and half in the United States.

Ahead of them lifted the Tecate hills. These were brush-covered—marked by *chamiso* and *manzanita* and buckboard. Here and there the wide expanse of an oak or cottonwood tree broke the evenness of the brush. Ed saw his horse-herd trailing up the road that led to the top of the ridge, some four miles distant. Already the leaders were over the ridge, going toward Hacienda Creek.

Ed remembered the trail. It would become a single ribbon a dozen miles out. It would run south, straight south, and then it would come out on Hacienda Creek, a small stream that ran into the Pacific.

This was a good country to raise horses. At the present time, horses were low in price, but Ed expected the price to boom in a year or two. His logic was simple: the United States and Spain were having trouble in Cuba, and it looked as though war would sweep the nation.

The United States army would then need broncs for cavalry service. Ed had been running horses in the mountains out of Blythe, out on the edge of the desert. One day an army officer had ridden into his camp.

"Howdy, Ed."

Ed had studied the man and then

grinned. "Damn it, Bil, I didn't recognize you all dolled up in that monkey suit! You got your loop out to catch something, huh? Mind telling a man what it is?"

"Over a drink," Lt. Bill Carter said.

They had ridden to the log house set at the base of the mountains. Ed poured two shots of bourbon and Lt. Carter drank his straight. "Ed, got any broncs—good horses that would make cavalry stock?"

"A few, I reckon." Ed scowled. "Why ask that?"

"I'm buying horses for the army. We need good cavalry horses real bad. I've been ordered to gather a bunch. From what I know from reports, we'll be at war with Spain in about three-four years. That ain't nice to think about but we got to face it. Why not spread out, Ed?"

"Where can I spread to. I have no range."

"There's range, Ed."

"Yeah, under wire — barb-wire. Land leased or owned by big brands that aim to squeeze out every small outfit, either cow or horse."

"Ever think of going to Mexico?"

Yes, Ed had thought of Mexico. In fact, he had just returned from a trip to Baja California, below Tecate. An old Mexican one de la Riviera, had died down there; his *rancho* was for sale. But what would he use for money to buy it?

The upshot of it was that Ed had got a government loan. He had bought mares in the mountain region and started them south under a trail-brand. He and his men had trailed them along the south shore of the Salton Sea, heading across the desert for the Julian mountains.

ONCE the Imperial Valley had been cow country, but the great All American canal was going through, turning the desert into a flowering wilderness. There was no room for cattle or horses there. California was through as a cow country except in the mountainous regions.

They had come out of the desert below Palm Springs, driving across the Painted Range for Carrizo Gorge.

The drive had been long and hot and sandstorm after sandstorm had whipped across the desert. Many times the sun was a red ball hanging over a curtain of driving sand.

The element of time had been in their favor. Because it was December, the nights had been cold. One night, in fact, it had snowed. Next morning the *ocotillo* and Joshua trees had held snow on their branches. Barrel cacti sported white heads on them. By noon the sand was blowing again.

All this had taken the edge from man and beast. Horses had grown gaunt and bony; stallions had ceased their endless neighing and prancing and had fallen into line, plodding through the thick sand. One water-hole had been bone dry. As a result, they had made a three day drive, finally reaching Dos Cabezas Spring on the rim of the desert. Here was fresh water running through the date palms. And here too were the double mounds of earth that had named this mountain spring. Dos Cabezas... two heads. Two skulls had once been found here. Skulls of unlucky prospectors beaten to death by sand and heat, victims of the California Imperial Valley.

But before making the drive, Ed had bought the land grant that had belonged to de la Riviera, bought it out from under Mack Colton, according to the recorder who gave him the deed in the territorial capital, Mexicali.

"Colton will not like that," the man had explained. "But our orders from Mexico City are to sell to the highest bidder. Colton himself, when he placed his bid, said he could go no higher. The grant is yours, Senor Garlan."

Ed had never met Mack Colton, but he had met Sean O'Henry, as he had told the border man, Tom Bishop. He glanced at Kid Harris. "*The Cantina del Oro, Kid.*" He translated it into English. "The saloon of gold. High sounding name. This okay for your gentle tastes?"

"Another saloon," murmured the tall rider.

They left their broncs at the tie-pole and went inside. The air was

cool in the saloon with the adobe walls. The floor was earth, hard-packed by endless boots and moccasins. The bartender was an aged man with the darkness of a Mexican. His skin was wrinkled and his eyes black pinpoints.

"Drink, *Americanos*?"

Kid Harris didn't know much Mexican, so Ed ordered two *tequillas*. The ancient slid a bottle across the plank bar. Ed poured and Kid Harris drank. He said, "That sure drives the cold out of a man."

Ed drank. "Embalming fluid," he said, drily. "Another?"

Harris nodded.

Ed glanced at the ancient. He was watching them, missing no move they made. He made no effort to get into conversation; neither did Ed or Kid Harris. They drank and Ed put four bits on the bar and they turned to go.

Three men had ridden up to the tie-rail. They sat their saddles for a long minute, and Ed grabbed Kid Harris' sleeve. Harris looked at him and then at the men who sat on the broncs.

"Cerveza brand on those broncs," murmured Harris.

Ed said thinly, "Mack Colton, I guess. I know Sean O'Henry. And from what Tom Bishop told me, that Injun jasper is Pinto Martinez."

"I'll move down the bar away," said Kid Harris.

ED WAS standing alone when the trio entered. They came in with rowels chiming, three big ranchmen. Chaps scuffled and boots hit the packed sod. Sean O'Henry was a squat, red-headed Irishman, stocky and thick of thigh. Mack Colton was tall, almost thin, and he carried himself stooped a little. Pinto Martinez was short and stocky, his swarthy face showing clearly his mixed bloods. Ed remembered that Tom Bishop had told him about the Apache's knife. Ed could not see it. Evidently Martinez carried it under his flannel shirt.

Sean O'Henry stopped. He looked at Ed, who had his back to the bar, his elbows hooked over the rim. "This is him, Mack," he said. "This is the *Americano*." He looked at Kid

Harris, who presumably was interested in his *tequilla* glass. Ed saw a shadow cross the Irishman's big face. He knew that O'Henry was wondering if Kid Harris was one of his riders.

"You Ed Garlan?" asked Colton.

The man's voice was low, too quiet. Ed looked at him for a long moment, and he read his hardness. This man had been raised in the cow country and he had used his gun. Long hours in the saddle had warped his thin legs to the barrel of a horse.

"I'm Ed Garlan. I take it you're Mack Colton."

Colton said, "You're right." He jerked a thumb toward Kid Harris. "Your hand?"

Ed shrugged.

Pinto Martinez went to the bar. "Put out glasses, *hermano*," he ordered. "*Tequilla* and whiskey. Open your private stock."

"No trouble in here, please *senores*."

"Move fast, *mozo*," growled Martinez.

Colton asked, "Drink?"

Ed was wary. He glanced at Kid Harris. "One," he said.

Colton filled the glass with whiskey. Ed noticed that his hand was rock-steady. They lifted glasses. "To this range," said Colton. They drank. Glasses came down to the bar. Colton asked, "Another?"

"No more," said Ed. "Empty belly."

Colton laughed. "Might not be empty long. Might get lead in it."

There was a silence. Ed let it grow. He fingered his glass carefully. Suddenly he had Colton by the shoulder. He turned him fast and hit fast. His fist smashed into Colton's jaw.

The whole thing was too fast, too unexpected. Colton hit and missed and Ed followed in. He heard Kid Harris say, "I got them covered, Ed. Give it to him."

Ed drove Colton back. He hit him again, got him against the wall, and steadied him. Colton drove a fist against Ed's heart. Ed swung hard, swung savagely. Colton's head bobbed under the impact. Colton sat down. Ed had his gun. He tossed it aside, after taking the shells from it.

Harris said quietly, "Be good, you two dogs."

Sean O'Henry's face was the color of a sweat-stained saddleblanket. Only the Apache had his anger in check. Ed came up, his back to Colton. He took O'Henry's gun and unloaded it and threw it after that of Mack Colton. Colton sat there and looked at Kid Harris, and was silent.

"No gun on me," said the Apache.

Ed Garlan twisted him around. He ran his hand under the man's wide cowhide belt and came out with a knife. He juggled it and then tossed it across the room. It hung by its tip in the frame of the window.

"I couldn't do that again in a hundred years," he said.

"You'll pay for this—" began O'Henry.

Colton said sternly. "Shut up, Sean."

Kid Harris juggled his gun up and down, the weapon never leaving the Apache. "Sounds like good advice to me," said the cowpuncher. "You ready to go, Ed?"

Ed looked at Colton. "When you threaten me again, bring your fists or guns to back it up. I don't scare easy."

"I'll remember that," said Colton.

KID HARRIS moved to the door, gun steady. He stood there and said, "All right, Ed. You go out and get on your bronc. Then cover this while I make it outside."

Ed walked outside. He found his stirrup and went up. He took his Winchester .25-35 out of its boot and held it. "All right, Kid."

Kid Harris ran out, gun dangling. He forked his bronc and said, "Now let's get out of town," and he used his rowels. Ed turned his horse and followed, with the cowpuncher's bronc kicking mud and gravel back at him. They raced down the street. No shots followed them. They went four blocks, riding now in brilliant afternoon sunshine. They turned a corner and Ed saw a sign that said:

Cantina Americano

"I'm hungry," he hollered

Kid Harris turned his horse, following Ed into the alley. They dis-

mounted and put their broncs in a small barn of four stalls and tied them to the manger. They entered the *cantina* by the rear door.

From all appearances, Mack Colton and his men would figure they had ridden out of Tecate. Ed remembered knocking the tall gunman down. He remembered that hard, terrible anger that had lighted Colton's dull eyes, remembered that measured silence that had followed. And he knew Tom Bishop had been right. There was trouble here on this Baja California range.

Only one other occupant was in the *cantina*— a girl, who stood at the door and looked out on the street. She heard them and she turned. The light, coming in the small window, showed across her, putting her in relief.

Ed saw dark red hair that lay in curls of burnished copper. He saw blue eyes and a stub nose and a wide mouth, too wide for beauty. But there was beauty in this girl. And then she moved out of the light.

"You are the two Americans?"

Ed noticed that she said Americans, not *Americanos*. That meant that she was an American. "Yes," he said. "We are them."

"I saw you go down the street on the gallop. You went by the front just a minute or two ago. What are you doing in here?"

"Hungry," said Ed. He was smiling a little.

She smiled, too. "So you decided to hide in here, is that it?"

"We don't hide," said Ed.

They took stools. She had *frijoles*—beans—bubbling in a pot and there were strips of bacon among them. She had coffee— American coffee, not thick Mexican coffee. The bread, too, was not dark; it was white.

She called the orders into the side-room and Ed heard a woman shuffling around in there and once he caught a glimpse of her looking out covertly at them. He had one eye on the street and one on the girl.

"You're an American?"

"Yes."

"What do you do—? Why are you on this side of the Line?"

"My father was a mining engineer. He followed gold through the desert. Always there was a vein here, a vein there. He followed gold until he died three years ago. I stayed in Tecate."

"I'm Ed Garlan. This gent is Kid Harris."

"We have heard you men were trailing horses in," said the girl. "My name is Katie Ryan."

"Irish," said Kid Harris. "Sean O'Henry is Irish too, I guess. I got some Irish blood in me, but I don't reckon me or Sean will get along okay. How do you get along with him?"

"Sometimes they come in here. By *they* I mean the Cerveza men. I guess we get along all right." She laughed a little then.

Their orders came. Each tackled food with a great diligence. Katie Ryan took a stool and sat and watched the street. Three riders drifted by, loping toward the south. Ed saw them through the small window. They were Colton and O'Henry and Martinez. He saw the girl lift her hand a little, let it fall.

Evidently the trio did not see him and Kid Harris. Or, if they did, they did not stop. "Heading for the Cerveza, I guess," he said.

The girl nodded.

Ed and Kid Harris finished their meal. Ed felt better now. The *tequilla*, coupled with the single shot of whiskey, had upset his nerves. Now, with his belly full, he settled down again to his old self. They rolled cigarets and talked with Katie. Ed liked her, he decided.

They talked of little things, but Ed finally got around to something serious. Yes, Senor de la Riviera had fought with the Cerveza iron, too. But he had been old and tired, and death had overtaken him naturally, not through a bullet or knife. His punchers had drifted out, saying they would not ride for an *Americano*.

Ed smiled thinly.

"Have you met Don Diego Alvarado?" she asked.

Ed shook his head.

"He runs cattle south of you. His is an old land grant, given to his family by the King of Spain, cen-

turies ago. He has one daughter, Zona, who is the oldest, and another daughter, Maria, who is younger. She is a hell-cat, that Maria."

"Does he fight Colton, too?"

The girl shrugged, a pretty gesture. "I don't know." She started gathering up the dishes and taking them into the kitchen. Ed paid for their meals and said goodbye. She looked at him and smiled.

"I'll see you again, maybe."

"Hope so," said Ed.

CHAPTER III

THE RAIN had fallen back and the sun was shining. The sudden heat was lifting steam from the drying Mexican soil.

"I could go for a girl like her," said Kid Harris.

"You can go for all of them, I've noticed that. But damn few of them go for you. I've noticed that, too."

Kid Harris grinned. "Plenty of them have made a fool out of yours truly."

Ed balanced himself on the edge of the dirt sidewalk. He was thinking of the *rancho* on Hacienda Creek. He remembered the *hacienda*, the ranch house. It was made of ancient 'dobe with a slack stake roof. The place was centuries old. Built in the form of a big U, it had a rock-floor *patio* between the wings. The floors were of hardwood, worn smooth by the endless parades across its surface.

He had liked the whole setup. The big bunkhouse with its beds hung by chains from the heavy adobe walls, its hardwood floors. Hardwood that came around the Horn by sailboat from Boston and the mills in New England. He had noticed that there wasn't a nail in any of the buildings, they were all pegged instead of nailed.

He looked to the south. The last of his horse herd was showing in the distance as the animals climbed the long hogback ridge. He watched them go across the ridge and then they were gone. They were spilling over the southern slope, working toward Hacienda Creek.

"Better get some chow out to

camp," he told Kid Harris.

"I'll pay you," assured Ed.

They went into the general store. Because of the closeness to the border, many American goods were on sale. The storekeeper, a short, wiry-haired Mexican, looked at them in some surprise.

"Me, I thought you men leave Tecate."

Ed said, "Talk Mex, we *sabe* it." He grinned widely. "We never left. Some people were just tricked into believing we pulled out."

"You want some supplies?"

Ed ordered groceries first. Sowsbelly and jerky constituted most of the purchases. The storekeeper assured him the jerky was made of wild goat but Ed bit into it and knew from the taste it was Yucatan turtle. He ordered some of it, though. He bought *frijoles* and *enchiladas* and *tortillas* in addition to other necessities: baking powder, flour, dried eggs and sugar.

"You'll haul that out to the *rancho*?" he asked.

The man shrugged. "The distance, she is a long one." He looked off suggestively to the south.

They settled up the bill and Ed paid in Mexican pesos. One thing was in his favor: the cost of running a horse-crew would be much less here in the chow line. Chuck could be bought in Baja California for about one-half the cost in the United States, and he needed every cent he could hang onto.

His mares would foal in a month or so. That meant that for three years, he would have no income except from the sale of a few scattered horses. Then his colts would be three-year-olds and they would break them to the saddle that spring. Of course, if things got too tight, he could probably get a government loan through Lt. Bill Carter; but he didn't want to do that unless necessary. For he had enough interest to pay on the loan he had made to buy the Hacienda Creek *rancho* and his mares.

But, the way he figured, a man never made any money working for somebody else. If he ran horses—or cattle—he might just as well run his

own stock, instead of somebody else's. He had taken a big step and it involved money but, with proper judgment and lots of work, he was sure it would pay off in the long run.

Therefore he had made agreements with his men. On paper, each drew so much *dinero* a month, this sum to be payable to them with interest at the end of three years. None of them had wanted that interest clause but Ed had insisted on it. "I'm paying interest to the bank for the use of their money," he had said. "You get interest, too."

THE MEXICAN said the supplies would be hauled out in the morning by his boy, Pedro. Pedro, just ten, grinned and Ed tossed him two-bits. Pedro bowed, almost ludicrously. His father took the money.

"You are no begger. Give this back to the man."

"I want it."

The father took the coin away. Ed said, "I'm sorry, *senor*," and pocketed the quarter. Pedro's dark eyes filled with tears.

Ed and Kid Harris went outside. They went down the street toward the *Cantina Americano* and their bronses. Suddenly Pedro darted out between two buildings. "I have come for the big *peso*," he said. "I ran out the back door."

Ed grinned and gave him the quarter.

They left Pedro and his rush of thanks behind them. A buggy wheeled down the street, and Ed turned and glanced at it. An old man, deep into his sixties, held the reins on a pair of dark sorrel geldings. Being a horse-man, Ed glanced at the bronses first. They were hotbloods crossed with hill bronses, he saw. They had the legs and build of a thoroughbred and the stamina of a hill horse.

The old man was a thoroughbred, too. He wore a blue suit, neat and conservative, and his hair was trimmed closely. His hat was of black beaver, the brim flat. Ed looked at the girl beside him. She was about twenty, he guessed. She was small and wiry and the Latin darkness was hers.

Kid Harris stepped between two

buildings, heading back for the barn. Ed started to follow and a man's voice said, "Senor Garlan, I wish to talk to you."

Ed stopped and turned. The old man had pulled the team close to the sidewalk. Ed walked out to him, Kid Harris following. They stopped beside the buggy. Ed took off his hat and Kid Harris did likewise. The girl smiled slowly.

The old man said, "I am Don Diego Alvarado. You will pardon me the liberty I took in calling to you, a stranger."

"You took no liberty, *senor*. May I present my friend, Kid Harris? And myself, as you know—I am Ed Garlan."

"My daughter, Senorita Maria Alvarado."

Ed remembered Katie Ryan's description of Maria. His eyes were serious as they met her dark eyes. He bowed a little. "Senorita Maria, my friend, Kid Harris."

The girl said, "I am glad to meet you," in American.

"You speak American?" asked Ed. "Un poco. A little."

Ed put his glance on Don Alvarado.

"We had heard your herd was coming through Tecate today," said the don. "We had never gotten a chance to meet you, our new neighbor, so we hooked the team and came in for some essentials, and to meet you. We saw your herd as it went over the south ridge. They are fine mares."

"We think so. *Gracias, senor*."

"We run cattle on our *rancho*. Of course, we raise some horses, but not enough for sale—just for our own use. Perhaps, when you have saddle-horses for sale, we shall purchase some."

Ed said, "The war."

The old man's eyes were thoughtful. "The thought sickens me, if I may say so. I hate to believe my brother man is so mean that he puts innocent horseflesh into a terrible battle of his own making, not the horses'. But enough of that. This civil war raging in our own country is no asset to our welfare."

"You think *Morto* will come this way?" asked Ed.

Don Alvarado looked at the hills across the Border. "If he is successful in the south, yes. He will come this way then. Men are riding out of Baja California and Sonora to join his legions. Perhaps his cause is just; perhaps the *peon* has been violated. Si, we know he has. But Civil War is another thing—" He shook his head.

Ed looked at Maria Alvarado. "My stock will be safe," he said. "Men do not ride in armies with mares about to foal." He smiled slowly.

"But when the colts are born?"

"No," said Ed suddenly, "I think my stock is safe. Mares are no good for saddle-horses. Even a man from Boston would know that."

THE OLD MAN nodded. "We shall see," he said. "Me, I would like to help *Morto*, and I shall when he comes to this section. Others of my class are fighting against him, trying to fight against the inevitable. Had they treated the *peon* as I treat him, there would have been no cause for a *Morto* to rise. But enough of this politics, *senores*. After you get settled, we want you all to come to a *fiesta* at the *rancho*. We shall name the date later."

"*Gracias*," murmured Ed.

Kid Harris said, in broken Mexican, "We will be there, Senorita Maria."

Don Diego Alvarado clucked to the team. But before the wheels could roll, Ed said, "Another moment, *senor*?"

The don held the reins taut. "*Si*?"

"You stand neutral in this, I see. You would be our friend. We are *gringos*, *senor*. We will put cards on the table, as the *Yanqui* says. We are not wanted in Baja California. We know that; so do you."

"Perhaps that is true."

"There are other *gringos* here. I refer to the Beer Bottle iron, the *Cerveza rancho*. An hour ago, I smashed Mack Colton to the floor in a *cantina*. He looked for trouble, he got it."

Something showed in the girl's eyes. He caught it, held it, and later he wondered about it.

"You talk to a point, *senor*."

"We do not want you, or your daughters, or your men, to think we came here to rob and loot. We came here to raise horses for the United States government and for whoever cares to buy out stock. If they leave us in peace, we shall respect the rights of our neighbors. We want you to know that, *senor*."

"I appreciate your stand. You shall have the respect and admiration of my brand, *senor*."

Maria said, flatly, "Colton and O'-Henry won't like this, *Senor Garlan*."

Ed smiled. "They'll like it or fight," he said bluntly.

The girl was silent, looking at a peon crossing the street. Don Diego Alvarado said, "*Buenas dias, senores*," and the sorrels moved ahead. Ed watched the team and rig leave Tecate. Once Maria glanced back.

"Pretty girl," said Kid Harris.

Ed said, "Another woman in your life, huh?" and they went to their horses. They got up and rode down the alley. A dog came on a mad lunge, aiming to bit the hamstrings of their broncs, and the hard end of Kid Harris' *maguey* rope went out. The dog yelped and rolled over and fled.

"He doesn't like us *Americanos*," said Harris.

They rode out at a quick lope, hoofs stirring the ancient soil of Mexico. They put their broncs against the long southern slant and let it wear them to a walk. Ed reckoned that the horse-herd was some fifteen miles or so ahead. They gained the ridge that was thick with crub-oak and *chamiso* and *manzanita*. To the south ran the tumbling, brushy range that somewhere met the rough Pacific. The beauty and desolation of the range thrilled Ed again, as it had done the first time he had seen it.

They loped down the slant, heading south. Mile after mile went by and neither man spoke, for each had his thoughts. Ed braced himself against his fork. He was tired of the trail, tired of the dust, tired of the desert. He appreciated that Kid Harris did not talk to him. He had his thoughts. They were enough.

One thing seemed apparent. Don Alvarado wanted his friendship, not

his antipathy. Ed Garlan was thankful for that; one foe was enough on any range, and Mack Colton was a tough foe. He let his mind dwell on the wiry don. Yes, the man was sincere; at least, he sounded that way.

"Rider coming this way," said Kid Harris.

"Looks like Hightail Smith," commented Ed. "Now why did he ride back—"

Smith's bronc was lathered. He pulled in and said shortly, "Ed, we hit the *rancho*. Our broncs are along the crick, eatin'. But hell, Ed, the *hacienda* is shot. Roofs gone off the buildings, inside gutted by fire. Every building. Only the walls are standing."

Ed could hardly believe him.

"Us boys looked everything over. We figure somebody dynamited the house an' buildings. And they did a good job!"

CHAPTER IV

DON DIEGO ALVARADO and his daughter had dinner in Tecate, then they put their team and buggy to the south, toiling up the high road that led over the ridge. The old man was silent, busy with thoughts. Beside him his daughter sat, also without words. Now and then she tugged at her gloves, pulling them up closer around her fingers.

"You are silent, *hija*, and it is not like you."

She smiled. "Are there not some things a woman must keep to her self, father?"

The don sighed a little. "I wish many times that your mother had lived to see her two daughters as women. But she had the pleasure of sharing your girlhoods with you."

She was suddenly soft. "Father, please don't talk that way. You sound as though you were thousands of years old."

The old man smiled a little. The sun was losing its heat. There had been a brush fire on the hills to the east when they had gone to town, but he saw that the thunderstorm had swept that way and put it out. He wished it had kept on burning. For,

when fire took out the *chamiso* and *mamzanita*, the grass grew green and high on the hills. Cattle and horses had an easier time to forage then when the grass grew short and brown in July and August.

It was forty miles to the Alvarado Rancho. They would change teams at Pinon Creek camp where the don had a line-camp to turn back cattle that wanted to drift north onto Bar S range.

Maria asked, "What do you think of the *gringo*?"

"What *gringo*? There are so many here." The don knew she referred to Ed Garlan, but he wanted to tease her. He glanced and caught the sparkle of her eyes.

"You know whom I mean. Senor Garlan."

"Do you know how the word *gringo* came, *hija*? The Irish were down in Sonora, or one of the provinces. They were loving and fighting there and they sang an old song, 'Green grows the lilacs', and the Mexicans called them *gringoes*. Green grows and *gringoes*. Now they are marked with that, Irish and all the other *Americanos*. From such a simple thing, a misunderstanding of a language."

She pouted. "I did not ask you how the word began. I asked you what you thought of the *senor*."

"How could I tell you, daughter? Have we sat, he and I, across from a dinner table; have we spent hours in the saddle, riding together? Or have we sat at cards and matched the other in wit?"

"He did not look dangerous to me."

"Surely, not to you. You are a woman; a woman cannot judge a man. A woman judges by her heart, not her head. Always, when a man is concerned, when he is judged, the woman must remember her heart. But he is dangerous; I am a man, I know the signs. He spoke quietly and to the point. He did not carry that gun to balance his weight against his right hip."

"Then he will fight Mack Colton and the Cerveza riders?"

Don Alvarado looked at the skyline. The sun was sinking behind the

hills. Live oak and wild brush stood out against the dazzling splendor. "To me, the sunset is the most beautiful part of the day."

"Sunrise is lovelier."

"To the young, yes. But to me, with my years, sunrise is beautiful, just as youth is beautiful. But the sunrise has no wisdom, it does not have the profit of old age. When the sun sinks, he is wise. He had seen a day of folly and a day of wisdom."

"Let us talk about Senor Garlan,"

"You like him?" The don smiled mischievously.

"Poooff, father!" She was silent. "He is a nice looking man, though. But do you think he will fight the Cerveza iron?"

"He has already fought them, *hija*. Already he had knocked Colton down. I envy Senor Garlan his youth and strength, for I would like to do the same myself."

There were silent on the rest of the drive. The night was heavy when they reached the rancho. From the basin below, as they wheeled across the ridge, came the flicker of lights from the adobe buildings. They left their team to the *mozo* and walked to the hacienda. Don Alvarado was tired despite his wiry hardness.

"You will have wine with me, *hija*?"

ZONA MET them in the living room. She had a small fire in the fireplace and the light reflected on her dark brown hair. She was a little taller than Maria, and she did not have her sister's drive. She was more quiet, more thoughtful. She kissed her father and said she had waited for them. What had been new in Tecate? Maria told her, the words quick.

"There will be trouble," said Zona.

Maria's eyes were bright in the light. "There has been trouble, *hermana*," she corrected. "Already Senor Garlan has beaten Senor Colton down." She told about the fight.

Zona's eyes were troubled. "As if this land did not have enough trouble with Pancho Morto and his raiders ready to turn this way after they take Sonora."

The squaw had food on the table. She was a Campo Indian who had been raised around Jacumba, but had turned into Mexico with her White husband. Her man had died in a mine cave-in and for ten years she had been with the Alvarado family.

THE TABLE CLOTH was of white linen imported from Castile. Wine reposed in tubular glasses and sparkled against the lamplight overhead. China glistened. They had roast kid and cheese and the squaw paddled back and forth, carrying food in and dishes back. It was close to midnight.

"You will sleep late tomorrow morning," Don Alvarado said to the squaw. "We are sorry we were so late, but the distance is far to Tecate."

"I all right."

The meal finished, the don toyed with his wine glass. He drank the muscatel and pushed back his chair. "I am going to rest, *hijas*. *Buenas noches*." The shadows played across his thin face.

He went down the hall.

"I go to my room," said Maria.

Zona said good night to her sister. Maria went down the hall; Zona heard the door close behind her. The squaw came in and the girl shoved out her glass. "*Mas vino, gracias*. More wine."

"You drink too much wine."

The squaw brought in a small pitcher of muscatel. Zona poured her glass and drank it fast, the way a man drinks whiskey; she filled the glass again. The wine was warm in her. Outside, the wind sang in the eaves. It was an endless sound and she remembered it from early girlhood.

She had a sudden thought: How many people had heard that sound before her? Here in this old adobe *hacienda* had lived hundreds of her ancestors. They too had listened to this endless wind and the wind had lost them. But why did she think of that?

She finished her wine and the squaw went into the kitchen. Still Zona sat there, down a little in her big chair, looking at the lamp and

listening to the slow wind. The squaw rattled dishes in the kitchen for some minutes and that killed the wind. She came out, wiping her hands on her apron.

"Time for sleep, *hija mia*."

Zona shook her head. Shadows danced across her dark hair. "After a while, *senora*," she answered.

"You will turn out the lamp?"

"Si."

The heavy woman went down the hall, shadows showing across her broad back. Zona heard her shut her door. The house fell quiet again. A horse squealed in the corral and she heard another horse trumpet loudly. "Fighting again," she thought. That sound died, too. Silence again.

SHE SAT THERE for an hour, drinking slowly. Finally she got to her feet and went out the back door to the barn and saddled a black horse. The *mozo* had long since gone to bed. She led the black out and shut the barn door. She rode a side saddle. The wind was a little cold; she had a robe and she put this around her shoulders. She snapped it in front and then the wind lost its biting edge.

She put the little black to a lope. He was a game little beast, and he was brushwise and tough. He followed a tortuous trail that went to the west and north. He seemed to know the trail as though he had been over it before.

Zona rode close to the saddle. Once the beast shied, but she stayed with him. A mule deer danced across a park, his flag up.

"Concho," the girl scolded. "Are your eyes so bad you cannot recognize your friend, the deer?"

Concho loped on. Fine lather rimmed the heavy Navajo saddle-blanket and formed around the headstall and bit. Zona pulled him to a walk. She came down a long slant, the force pulling her slenderness against the fork, and at the bottom of this slant a man rode out of the brush, dark against the night.

"*Quien va? Who goes?*"

She said, almost sternly, "Zona."

The man laughed quietly. He rode

close and put his arm around her. He held his horse in tight against Concho and he bent the girl's head back and kissed her. They were one for some time, then he drew back.

"Why do you ride on this night, linda?"

"To see you, of course."

"To see an *Americano renegado*—an American renegade—a don's daughter rides. Surely this must be love."

He kissed her again.

She said, breathlessly, "Sean O'Henry! Surely you have kissed too many other women, to kiss like that."

The Irishman was laughing again, laughing almost silently. "I cannot say that I have not, *hermosa*. But I can say this, and I say it with all my heart: I shall kiss no other but you."

He dismounted and helped her from her horse. They walked to a cabin set in the *pinons*. On the outside, it looked as though there were no lights; that was because the two windows, small as they were, were sealed with oilskin. Zona felt warm inside. Sean O'Henry helped her take off her cloak. He laid it on the cot.

"You will have wine with me?"

"Yes." She smiled.

He poured two goblets from a jug. "I do not like this, Zona. I have told you that before. You are Don Diego Alvarado's eldest daughter; I am Sean O'Henry, Irish and of bad blood. Yet we love each other."

"Someday," she said, "we leave, Sean."

He looked across his wine glass. "When?"

She frowned. He liked her that way. "It had better be soon," she said. "Yes, it had best be soon."

They drank. He paced the floor. "You should not go with me. You should not go, I tell you."

She got to her feet. She crossed the room and put her hands against his chest. She brought her arms up and held him. "I could stay here," she said. "I could marry some of my blood and lineage. But what would I have. Would I have a wild Irishman, a lover? No, Sean."

"I should leave without you, and not let you know."

She looked at him steadily. "If you do that, I will die. I will kill myself." He saw tears in the corners of her eyes.

"But we steal your father's cattle. You know that. We steal them and ship them out. We are stealing from you—and you love me."

"Even if you left, Mack Colton would still keep on stealing Alvarado cattle. You cannot stop that."

"I could."

HER EYES had fear again. "No, Sean, no. Do not pick trouble with Colton, please. For my sake, don't. Ride with him and get what money we can get together. Then, some day, we take the boat out of Ensenada for the South America. Sean, we'll go together."

"You'll leave your father?"

"For you, yes. There comes a time when all the young must leave. He will grieve, of course, but he has not much time left. That may sound brutal, Sean. I am not cruel. You know that."

He paced the room. He stopped, bit his lip. "We'll do that," he said. Then his smile turned ironic. "We'll buy down there... on your father's money. You could call it his money. It will come from stolen cattle—cattle stolen from him. Has the Lord ever looked down on such irony?"

"But if we went to him—he would not let us marry."

Again, O'Henry paused. He considered that, as he had considered it a dozen times before. "No, he would not consent. He would send you to the Sisters; I would never see you then. I think you are right."

"Then that is settled?"

"Yes."

She ran her finger over her chin. "There was trouble today in Tecate," she said. "Maria and papa told me about it. I remember you said that you and this man, Ed Garlan, had fought before."

"Yes, we fought. I could not whip him." He pounded one fist into the other. "I'd like to try, again."

"Don't talk that way."

His eyes were sharp. "There might be gunplay here. Especially if your

father joins with Ed Garlan and his crew. I couldn't pull a gun against your father."

She was silent.

"We dynamited the Bar S *hacienda*," he said suddenly. "We dynamited it and then rode to Tecate to see Ed Garlan."

The girl sat huddled, silent. She remembered her father's *hacienda*, and she remembered the wind in the eaves, the memories of centuries measured by it. And she felt as though she had lost a friend. For she knew the Bar S *hacienda* well.

"Sean, where will this end?"

CHAPTER V

ED GARLAN walked through the remains of the *hacienda* with a tight feeling inside of him. Hightail Smith had minced no words in saying that the buildings were in ruin. Somebody had sure given the Bar S a "house-warming" party to welcome them to Baja California.

The house was in ruins. The floors had been burned out and the roof burned off; only the thick 'dobe walls had weathered the shock of the dynamite. In some places, the three-foot-wall had sprung under the impact of the powder. Windows stared at him with their panes broken.

The bunkhouse was almost as ruined as the house. Ed walked through it, a little grim. He wondered who had done this; had it been Mack Colton and his Cervaza riders? Evidence pointed their way. Suspicion thrust a long finger toward the west and the Beer Bottle iron.

"But that don't prove nothing," said Skinny Marsh.

"What'll we do, Ed?" Kid Harris spoke.

The Bar S men were hunkered on the ground. The wind was a little chilly. Although they were south of the Line, there would be snow sometimes during the winter on the higher reaches with their scrub-oak and dwarf-pine.

Ed smiled a little. "Nothing much we can do, *hombres*. If we had some dynamite, we could finish proper what somebody else started, I guess.

But we ain't got no dynamite. This *hacienda* is no good to us."

Skinny Marsh looked at long Hightail Smith, at Kid Harris, at Pedro Malone. He lifted his fat-rimmed eyes to Ed. "There's just five of us, Ed."

"We have to get a Mex crew for construction," said Ed.

Pedro waved a brown hand. He was a fat, thick man, very short and with long arms. He walked the way an ape walks. "But my *compadres*—my co'ntry men—they are all out fightin' with Senor Pancho Morto to liberate *Mejico*. Perhaps there are none of them to work on the buildings we build?"

Probably not in Tecate," said Ed. "But there might be some in Ensenada. That's further west and the revolution fever might not have hit there yet. You ever been in Ensenada. Pedro?"

Pedro smiled widely. "Si, once I was there. For a week, too. This girl I met there—her papa—"

Kid Harris cut in. "Prob'ly run you out with a scattergun." He got to his feet and looked at Ed Garlan. "No use standin' here jawin'. Ed. We got broncs on new grass an' they might drift."

They unloaded their pack horses back across the ridge on a creek that ran down to the Pacific. Because of the cloudburst, the creek ran rapidly; they spread their rolls at the rim of the hill, far enough from the creek to keep away from its waters if it rose suddenly and still on the level ground. But Ed knew there would be little sleep for him or his riders this night.

They put their mares the length of the creek. The rain had turned the mountainous desert into green grass that would last until about the end of May. Then the torrid sun would burn the grass down. By that time, the mares would have foaled and Ed intended on fording them a little grain to supplement their meager feed from foraging. One thing was in their advantage. The mares were tired. Some were very heavy with foal and would throw

colts in a few weeks, some before that.

But days were short this time of the year; a long night lay ahead. By eight o'clock it was dark. The sun might be up by six...and it might be later. Ed divided the night into five guard-periods of two hours each. Pedro took the first lick; Hightail the second; Kid Harris the third. Ed would take from two to four in the morning and Skinny Marsh would take the last period.

THE OBESE man climbed into his bed rolled under a boxelder tree. "And here I thought I'd sleep like a king tonight on a soft feather tick in an *hacienda*. But here I am as usual, rolled up between sougans on the hard breast of Mother Nature."

"Shake the graybacks out of your tarp and hit the hay," growled Pedro, stepping into saddle.

Ed planned to keep the mares more or less bunched, just allowing them enough freedom so they could find plenty of grass. The grass at this time of the year was mostly water; it filled a horse but it had little energy. Later the hot sun would put the energy into the feed.

The Bar S boss lay between blankets, the night thick about him. Up the creek he heard the dim tinkle of the bell on a lead mare. The destruction of the *hacienda* had set them back on their haunches. Now he would have to build another set of buildings. He wished he knew for sure that Colton had dynamited the spread. He would settle with Colton tomorrow then, for once and for all ways.

But he had no definite proof pointing to the Cerveza boss. Drifting Morto raiders might have come through, working miles ahead of the renegade's army. They might have blasted the *hacienda* skyward. Or maybe the Apaches, pressed hard in Arizona, had slipped miles across the border. Ed doubted this latter, though. The Apaches were pretty well settled on reservations.

Of course, the Mexican Apaches—They were a different matter. He wondered if they abided by Mexican reservations rules, now that Pancho

Morto was on the prowl? Sleep was slow to come. He thought of the people he had met during his few hours on this range. They filed across his brain, walking in slow procession. He tried to fit each into his proper niche; then he gave up. He did not know them well enough yet to catalog them as to their abilities and desires.

He was still awake when Pedro rode in. He said, "How goes the set-up, Pedro?"

"The mares, they are quiet. Some have bedded down. Me, I will bed down, too, *sabe?* *Yo tengo consado*. I am tired."

The mountainous man shuffled to his bed, sat down and pulled off his boots and socks. The earth was damp under Ed's tarp and he caught the clean smell of growing things. The next thing he knew, Kid Harris was shaking him by the shoulder.

"Your herd, Eddie boy," said the puncher.

Ed yawned and pulled on his socks and boots and was fully dressed. The stars were shiny points suspended against blue silk. A chill was in the air. Ed got his brush-jumper and put it on. He had a night-horse staked out on picket—a top black horse called Whitey. He put the saddle on him and Whitey nibbled at his sleeve.

"You old sugar pirate," said Ed. "I ain't got no sugar for you. You're in Mexico now, fella, and your soft days are over."

Ed went up, the saddle firm under him. He found his off stirrup and turned the big black. He rode up the creek, riding wide around the dark splotches that told him mares were bedded down. He did not want to ride them to their feet. He wanted his two hours to pass as quickly as possible. When he got to the rim-rock, the wind was real sharp, seeming to cut through his buckskin jacket.

From here he could see his horses. Some were grazing along the edge of the hill. He rode to the end of the herd, some three miles away. This would be the darkest part of the night. When he reached the herd's end, he dismounted and settled in the

brush, holding Whitey's bridle reins. Here the sandstones cut the wind from him and turned it.

HIS TRICK passed uneventful. He dozed. When his Ingersoll showed close to four, he started working back to camp. He got in about four thirty. Skinny Marsh was lying under his sougans, smoking a cigaret. Ed squatted beside the huge man and watched the ebb and fall of the cigaret's ash as Skinny dragged on it. He caught a whiff of the tobacco.

"Mex cigaret, huh?"

Skinny held it up and look at it. "Got it in Tecate. Sure is tough; it'll bring another hair on my chest. Reckon they dont cure their tobacco down here, or somet'ing. Don't taste like durham to me."

"No tobacco in durham," said Ed. "Ground up corn leaves and molasses and some dried heifer dust out of a corral. No use me goin' to bed. You stay in an' I'll wait for old man sun to come up."

"I've had my nap," said Skinny.

Ed went back to Whitey. Ten minutes later, Skinny rode up to where Ed sat in the brush. The fat man yawned. "Night and day...night and day. You need nighthawks, Ed, not a crew."

"You grow fat on it."

Skinny sucked on another tailor-made cigaret. "I'll get used to them or die," he said. "Well, Ed, what's ahead? You're the ramrod of this outerfit."

Ed ran a finger through the dust. Skinny waited.

Ed said, "We didn't come here to fight. We came here to raise broncs for the government. We had the hard luck to move into a territory that Colton and his Cerveza men run on. I've got a patented deed to his *rancho*. Colton will have to move his cattle. I own this land. If Colton has cattle on our grass, he has to move them."

"He bought Riviera cattle, I understand. They'll drift back to their old range, now our graze. He might claim he can't keep them at home, might use that for an excuse. Cattle

do drift back to their old graze, where they were dropped as calves."

"We'll put them back on Cerveza graze. Then it's up to him to keep them on his land. We'll put it up to him."

Skinny was silent for some time. "That might mean guns and gun-smoke, Ed." He was stroking his fat jaw. "They've got us outnumbered."

Ed considered that.

"I wouldn't like to be buried in *Mejico*," said Skinny. He grinned, but Ed could not see that.

Ed said, "We'll run a drift fence. But first, we'll give him a chance; that's only fair."

"Nothin's fair to Mack Colton or Sean O'Henry," stated Skinny. "What about those buildings? They were worth money."

"I left a Mex to guard the place," said Ed. "He must've pulled out. With Morto moving up and down, nothing is certain. He might be a gunner over in Sonora now. Or he might be dead."

"Or married," finished Skinny.

They sat there until dawn and argued good-naturedly. They had been together for years on roundup camps and in trail towns. Each understood and appreciated the other's abilities. When the sun colored the sky they rode down on the men who still slept. Skinny's bellow brought them awake.

"Come on outa 'em, boys, an' rustle some chuck!"

They rolled their beds again and put them on the sidehill. Skinny had a fire going along the creek. The stream had settled somewhat in the night. The dawn was bright and clear and cold. Pedro Malone shook himself. "She is as cold in *Mejico* as she is in Arizona. Some people they think that all the time it is warm south of the Line. They are mistaken.

Some people don't believe it snows on the desert, either," said Skinny.

The heavy man was a good cook and fast. Soon he had the coffee poured and they nursed their cups, feeling the java drive the chill out of them. Then he had "saddle-blankets" ready—or so the punchers called his hot-cakes.

None of them complained. They

joked and kidded and swapped lies. For years they had all lived in round-up camps and they had eaten from tin plates filled with grub cooked over a greasewood fire. They did not ask for fancy food. They wanted good clean food and plenty of it.

"Bacon," said Skinny. "Sowbelly."

ED SAT CROSSLEGGED, plate on his chaps. They had traveled light without a mess wagon, toting their beds and grub in on pack-horses. Skinny's biscuits were not up to normal, and he was quick to tell his crew about them.

"You cook 'em," said Skinny.

That silenced Ed. They finished and tossed their pans in a pile for Skinny to scour in the creek with wet sand. Ed squatted again and rolled a durham cigaret. Up the stream, a mare nickered.

"Some horse has become a mama," said Hightail.

Kid Harris licked his wheat-straw. "Prob'ly that sorrel mare," he said. "She was awful heavy when we went through Tecate."

Pedro Malone looked at Ed. "What she ees first, boss?"

"You ride to Ensenada. Hire about six Mexes for to build a new house and outfit. Get hold of all the lumber you can, *sabe*? Get somebody to haul it out for us. But we need carpenters. Get some hammers and nails and everything you think we need."

"We could build the place out of adobe. Or out of stone."

Ed considered that. "Both take a long time, Pedro. No, we'll build a small place out of lumber. If we can't get that, we can trim some of the straighter oak and pine. Use that for walls. Then, we can build out of stone. What you can't get in Ensenada, try to get in Tecate. When will you be back?"

"Tomorrow. Noon, I'd say. Maybe later, if I go to Tecate, too."

"All right."

The Mexican saddled a grey gelding. Ed noticed that he had his Winchester .30-30 in his saddle boot, and he also noticed that Pedro Malone checked the gun before he mounted. The Mexican rode west.

Skinny Harris spoke. "What'll the rest of us do, boss?"

"Look over the new Bar S range."

CHAPTER VI

SEAN O'HENRY said, "What about our cattle, Mack? They're running over on the Bar S range."

"Their old home range," said Colton.

O'Henry smiled quietly. "Sure, it is. I'll grant you that. Those cattle were raised on what is now the Bar S. But they are your cattle; they're not Ed Garlan's. Ed won't want them on his range."

Colton said, "We'll see."

The hour was late, some time past midnight. O'Henry had ridden in, left his horse in the barn, stepped out of the shadows. And Mack Colton's voice had said, "You ride late hours, Sean."

"Yes, I do."

O'Henry had not told him he had met Zona Alvarado this night. He was a border *renegado*, but his love for this girl was the one clean thing in his life, and he didn't want Colton to know about it. He wanted only two people to know: himself and Zona. Colton had the same as asked him where he had been, and he had indirectly told the Cerveza boss to mind his own riding.

"You want a drink?" asked Colton.

They went to the house together. Inside a lamp flickered, making wild shadows dance against the dark ceiling and walls. The wind was a fine distant murmur. "You're up late," said O'Henry.

"Thought I'd keep an eye open. Them Garlan men won't like the Bar S when they see what that powder of ours did. You can't tell about Ed Garlan. He might hit fast and hit suddenly."

"But you got a guard out. When I come off the rimrock, Pinto Martinez stopped me."

"Two pair of eyes are better'n one pair."

Colton was a little drunk. He poured two water glasses full of *tequilla*. O'Henry smiled and poured

most of his back into the jug. Colton scowled and lifted his glass and drained it while O'Henry nursed his drink along.

Finally O'Henry said, "Damn' funny thing Garlan wouldn't have driven in cattle. Then he'd been some use to us. Damned if I'd know about Morto wantin' horse meat for his men, 'stead of cow."

"They're hungry," said Colton. "Morto's got to feed them plenty of meat, or they'll leave him. When there's no steak, his army pulls out, and he can't win without soldiers. His cause is our cause."

O'Henry laughed. "Where do you get that pulp, Colton. *His cause is our cause*. Morto's fight is his own fight. We stand to gain nothing more out of it than we do— nice pesos for Don Alvarado's cattle, nothing more. When Morto's in the saddle, where will we be? *Quien sabe?*"

"His promises are no good?"

"No better than ours.... Border *renegados*, the whole damn bunch of us. Play with him, Mack, but don't trust him."

Colton scowled. He poured more *tequilla*. He held the bottle, looked questioningly at his range-boss. "More?"

"No mas."

Colton set the bottle down. "Garlan will want me to move those cattle; I won't do it. He'll have to move them himself. They'll drift back as soon as he hazes them on our grass. They'll go back to their old range. A cow is that way."

"Garlan won't stand for that long."

COLTON'S eyes were bloodshot. "He's got two ways out, then. This is the way I figure it, Sean. He doesn't want our cows on his grass; he won't stand for it. He can come to me. I'll do nothing. He can chase the cows on our land. They'll come back. Then he'll come to me again."

"With guns," finished O'Henry.

"That's what I meant. You know Garlan better than I do, I guess. Have I got him pegged right?"

O'Henry rubbed the plane of his jaw. He remembered that fight with Ed Garlan, up in the Owens Valley.

"Yeah, that's about it, Ed. He'll come with guns, *maybe*."

"Why the *maybe*?"

"We got his crew outnumbered. Garlan's no fool. No, I don't think he'll run his men against ours; we've got too many."

"What will he do then?"

"You tell me."

"He'll run a drift fence across the hills. That'll mean work and expense for him, and I don't think Garlan has too much *dinero*. You know what can happen to a drift fence, don't you?"

O'Henry's face was grooved. "It can be cut, and cattle can stampede against it and rip it out."

"Not cattle."

O'Henry studied Colton. "All right, horses then. Ed Garlan's horses. When horses stampede, they'd run into anything. I saw a bunch get away up in Thermopolis, Wyoming, some years back. They piled over a cliff and laid dead by the hundreds along a crick. So your play is to set back and watch for a while, huh?"

"Good as any," Colton got to his feet. "Where does Don Alvarado fit into this? Whose side is he on?"

O'Henry had a moment of indecision. Did this big man know about him and Zona? No, he couldn't. "How would I know?" he asked.

Mack Colton smiled. "You'd better get between sougans, Sean. That *tequilla* is makin' you snuffy. Want another snort before you hit it?"

"I wanta sleep, not count elephants."

COLTON SAT and watched the rider go out. He heard O'Henry's boots go down the hall, stop, a door opened. The boots sounded again and the door closed. The house was silent. Only the wind sounded and it was a thin, lifeless sound. Colton poured another drink. Dawn was but hours away. He was not sleepy. He drank again and pushed his legs out and he looked absently at his boots. This thing was shaping up in his mind. It was building up; it was taking definite lines, but there were still some shadows in it. These would be gone in a few days, he knew.

Until the coming of Ed Garlan, he

had controlled what was now Bar S range. True, Don Alvarado ran a few cattle on it; there were strays, though. As a rule, the don's riders were quick to take off any Alvarado stock that trekked to Bar S grass. But without Bar S range, Colton's cattle would be pressed for graze. He would either have to expand another direction or cut the size of his herds. He didn't want to do that latter; he wouldn't do it.

Where could he expand? He could move against Don Alvarado. He shook his head. A sudden image flashed across his memory. It was sharp and bright and without satisfaction. That was the image of the beating Ed Garlan had given him the day before in the *Cantina del Ore...* There had been more than physical pain lost in that brief fistfight. He had lost some of the respect the local Mexicans had paid to his fists and guns. An *Americano* had come and whipped him. Whipped the man who had run this section of Baja California much to suit himself.

Colton didn't like to think of that. He got to his feet and walked to the window. Time had run faster than he had expected. Dawn was breaking across the *chamiso*-covered eastern hills. He waited until the thin ribbon of smoke trickled upward out of the cookshack and then he took another drink, put the jug away, and went to the mess-shack.

The Chinaman grinned. "You up early, bossy man." Colton had bought him out of bondage from the smuggler who had taken him into Mexico.

"My liver, Wong."

"*Tequilla*, him no good for the liver."

The Chinaman put hotcakes and coffee in front of Colton. Although the Cerveza owner had been up all night, he was not sleepy. Colton ate with a slowness, watching his men come in. Sean O'Henry was the last to enter. "One thing wrong with night," he said. "Sundown and sunrise is too close together."

They were all there. Colton looked at each man, appraising him. Finally he came to Sean O'Henry. There was no way of appraising this man.

Colton knew he was faithful to the man who paid his wages, but did his loyalty go beyond that point? Colton did not know. You can never tell about a crazy Irishman, he decided.

He said, "We play our cards close, men. For a day or two, we do nothing. Garlan holds the key. We got him where we want him. He'll haze back Beer Bottle cattle; they'll drift over. Then he'll come to me."

They were silent.

"That's all for now. Sean, you ride with me. The rest of you go about your old jobs. Ride in pairs all the time. Pack short-guns and take rifles on your saddles. Keep plenty of cartridges. If you need more bullets, I got a couple of cases in the house. Are there any questions?"

"What if the Bar S jumps us?"

"Fight them back, of course."

They finished eating and went out. Only O'Henry and Colton and the Chinaman were in the cookshack. Outside the sun was gaining height and warmth. Soon the winter rains would be here. Then it would rain steadily for a month or two. Colton watched the bright light creep through the open door and glisten on the floor. The Chinaman gave them more coffee.

O'HENRY leaned back. "Well, lost my appetite." His eyes were quick on Colton. "What's on the big mind now, sonny lad?"

"You talk like a damned fool!"

"Maybe I am one?"

Colton looked at him. He rolled a cigaret. "You Irishmen! Born with a shamrock in one hand and Lady Luck in the other. You ride with me; we have a few calls to make. We're society girls, you know. Pass the tea?"

"Your bottle's in the house," said O'Henry.

Outside, Colton heard the squeal of a bucking horse. A cowboy was laughing, another shouting. The horse bucked into sight through the open door. The cowboy was putting up a ride, a good ride. The horse bucked out of sight.

"That old Baldy horse. He never learns."

"Reminds me of myself," said O'Henry.

They waited until the crew had gone out. Two men loped by, four long-legged hounds running ahead of them. They were going back into the rough country looking for a cougar that had cut deep into the calf crop. They would probably be gone for a week, getting grub from line-camps and changing horses at various corrals.

The *rancho* fell silent. Back in the kitchen, the Chinese was cleaning pots, banging them now and then to break the silence. O'Henry was restless, his fingers drumming on the table. He was thinking of many things, mostly of Zona Alvarado. He should get her and go; he should take her and leave this section. With gun-smoke ahead, a man's future wasn't very certain. And, for the first time in his life, Sean O'Henry thought of his future. He didn't want to spend it in a *Mejico* grave on the rimrock; he wanted to spend it in *America del Sur* on a *rancho* of his and Zona's.

Colton said, finally, "Let's ride."

They went to the corral. The *mozo* was just lowering the bars to let the *remuda* out on pasture. Colton said, "Hold it, we want horses."

The oldster grinned. "Figured you two scissorbills was still in sougans. Rope your cayuse an' I'll let the rest loose."

O'Henry laid his loop on a blue roan and pulled him in. Colton sent a loop out, missed his horse, pulled in his rope.

"You stay up too late nights," said O'Henry.

CHAPTER VII

DON DIEGO Alvarado awoke early, as usual. He was up before any of his household or any of his hired hands. He had slept poorly. He tried to hide his worry. There was trouble here—and it might involve him and his.

Not that he would sidestep trouble. He had fought his share of *renegados* and warpath redskins in his sixty-odd years. He knew fear and he had conquered fear many times, as a

brave man must in order to be brave. He had no great love for personal property. He had no desire to attain great amounts of wealth, either real or personal.

But he wanted to be left alone. He had his *rancho* that had been handed down to him, generation after generation. For centuries, an Alvarado had lived on this land grant; he had raised his family, had treated his retainers with kindness, had tended to his crops and his herds. Always the eldest boy had inherited the *rancho* after provisions had been made for other of his sons or daughters, as the case might be. Now he was the last of the male Alvarados.

This did not bother him greatly; he was not proud of his name. Any name, he figured, was a good name, unless its owner violated his name's sanctity. His daughters would marry; he was sure of that. Nature intended them to marry. Other women married; his daughters were of no different mold.

Therefore, after his death, another man—not an Alvarado—would rule this *rancho*. This did not disturb Don Alvarado. He would be dead. He only hoped that Zona's husband, be he an American or Mexican, be a good man—a hard worker and an honest man to carry on the *rancho's* heritage.

So far neither of his *hijas* seemed inclined toward matrimony. Maria was a pretty girl; so, for that matter, was Zona. But where Maria's beauty was flamboyant, brittle, Zona's was deep and with many facets. Maria took after her mother; Zona after him. Zona had hinted a number of times she might take the veil instead of marrying. Don Diego Alvarado had said he would be happy if she were in Sisterhood.

He went for a short walk in the dawn. The chill of night was still on the land. His terrier, *Muchachito*, ran with him, dancing and jumping.

"What are you so happy about, Little Boy?"

Muchachito started after a brush rabbit that eluded him in the *chamiso*. When the don came back to the ranch, men were stirring at the barn and the buildings. He went to the

house and pounded on the doors of his daughters' rooms. Maria was smiling when she came into the living-room but Zona was still sleepy.

"Two good-for-nothings," chided their father. "Sleep late when the sun is warm and fresh in the new sky. See the sun while you may, I say."

Maria kissed his forehead.

The girls chatted at breakfast. Don Alvarado remembered they had gotten along very well all their lives. Of course, in childhood there had been a few squabbles—they had not lasted long. Zona had spent two years in Mexico in convent school but Maria had only lasted half a term. She had pined away for the rocky slopes of Baja California and the *rancho*. So the Sisters had sent her home. Don Alvarado always figured they had been sort of glad to get rid of her.

"That *Americano*," said Maria. "I could love him."

This was old talk to Don Alvarado. Maria was always saying, "I could love him." He winked at Zona who was busy with her coffee. "You mean the fat one, the one called Skinny?"

"You know who I mean, papa."

"The one called Kid Harris?"

Maria cocked her head like a bird. "Well, he looks nice, though."

Zona said, "You know who she means, papa. Don't act so dumb."

DON ALVARADO was serious. "You two girls had better make eyes at some good men. I'm getting old; I need a young man to run this *rancho*! Why did I ever have to be cursed with *dos hijas*? What did I ever do to God to get such punishment."

They had both heard this before, too.

Zona looked up from her oatmeal. "Would an *Americano* do, papa?" Don Alvarado did know she deliberately made her voice light, but Maria glanced at her covertly before looking back at her father.

"A good *Americano*, yes."

"We are out then," said Maria. "There are no such things as good *Americanos*." She considered. "Well, we will see how *Senor Garlan* comes to be, and then there is always the

fat man, Skinny." She laughed.

They finished their meal and took over the dishes, leaving the squaw to get things outlined for dinner. They chatted and argued and stormed, but still Zona's heart was not in it; and Maria saw this.

"You are ill, Zona?"

"I slept poorly."

The squaw said, "You are in love." She never knew how close her bantering talk came to the truth.

The dishes washed and stacked, Zona went to her room where she lay on the bed. Maria went to the barn and saddled her pinto. With *Muchachito* running ahead, she rode up to where Don Alvarado sat in the shade of the bunkhouse, talking with the old *mozo*. She waited respectfully for an opening in their conversation.

"I am going to see the cattle to the west, papa."

"You don't ride alone, girl. You get Mono to ride with you. He is at the corral with a sick horse."

"Can't I ride alone?"

"No, *senorita*."

"But Mono is an old man."

"All the safer for you, then."

She stuck out her tongue. "You want me to get married, you say. Yet, I ride with Mono. I'll tell you the truth: I was not going west, I was going east. I was going to call on the *Americanos*."

"I thought so. Mono goes with you."

"Oh, all right." She loped down to the corrals. Soon she and the old retainer rode west over the hills. Don Alvarado and the *mozo* were sitting at the bench when Mack Colton and Sean O'Henry rode up.

"You two have left home early," said the don. "You will leave your *ensallados* and take a seat? Perhaps a drink of something?"

Colton shook his head. "We were over on the edge of Bar S range, Don Alvarado. You have some cattle over there. Not many head, but they have drifted onto that range, and Ed Garlan might turn them back."

"I have dispatched riders over there. They will turn them back onto my range. My cattle will stay on the boundaries of my grass. Those that

stray off will be turned back. I want you to turn back any Alvarado cattle you see, if they are on your land. I have asked you to do that before."

Colton looked at Sean O'Henry. The heavy Irishman did not meet his gaze. He was looking at the *hacienda*. He caught Colton's glance and jerked his eyes back to the old don.

"Then you will not fight Garlan?" asked Colton.

"We have nothing to fight about. He has his boundaries; you have yours. I respect you both as gentleman. My cattle stay inside my own lines, the lines established by my ancestors. My *vaqueros* will ride that line and turn those back who want to drift."

Colton nodded. "Garlan might come to you for trouble."

"What reason would he have?"

Colton shrugged.

 O'HENRY'S face was colorless. Don Alvarado saw his eyes were on Zona, who had come out on the porch to water her geraniums. Colton was angry and tight inside, but he held this.

"What is your stand?" asked the don.

Colton spoke one word. "War."

The old man was quiet. The old *mozo* looked hard at the ground as though vitally interested in it.

Colton said, "We just wanted to know where you stood. Come on, Sean." He turned and rode off at a running-walk. O'Henry nodded at the don and the *mozo*, and followed his boss.

They rode for a mile or so, with Colton thoughtful in saddle. "We get no help there," he said.

O'Henry shrugged. "Did you expect any?"

Colton looked hard at him. "No, I guess not. But if we could get the Alvarado and Garlan men fighting each other, we could have an easier time. There might be a way to do that yet, you know."

The Irishman nodded.

They pushed east, riding stirrups. Land moved under their broncs, then went back into distance. The sun came up and hung and the land knew

heat. Colton was serious, lines pulled deep. Sean O'Henry was deep in leather, scowling. Colton was thinking of this land and this grass and what it meant. O'Henry was thinking of a woman. The Irishman stirred himself.

"We're on Bar S graze, Mack."

Colton said, "I can read sign."

They came to a ridge. Below them was a brushy valley. Two riders were hazing cattle along the west rim of it, and they went down. They rode in with their right hands high and a looseness about them. Ed Garlan and Skinny Marsh sat silent saddles and watched the two Cerveza men.

Colton said, "You're working Cerveza cattle—my cattle."

Garlan looked at him, then at O'Henry. Skinny Marsh wiped his forehead with a deliberate slowness. Garlan said, "They're on my graze. Are you taking them off, or do we have to run them off?"

"Your grass. Your duty to keep it free of outside cattle."

Garlan glanced at Skinny Marsh. The fat man had a slight smile across his thick lips. He murmured, "Nice neighbors, Ed," and Garlan caught his temper in time.

"They'll work back," said Colton quietly. "They'll come back because they were born and raised here. Cattle always return to their old grass."

"They might not get back, then," said Garlan. "They might not be able to travel. When you lift a hide off a beef—or put a bullet between his eyes—he can't travel far."

"You're in Baja California now, not Arizona. There's a law in *Mejico* that says you have to run a drift fence if you want to keep stray stock off your grass." Colton looked at Sean O'Henry. "Nothing here for us."

Colton turned his horse. O'Henry did the same. Skinny Marsh pushed his bronc close to the Beer Bottle *segundo*.

"Somebody dynamited the Bar S *hacienda*," the heavy man said. "Colton, we figure it was you and your riders. You're out of arm's reach, so I'll give it to this gent." He drove his right fist forward. The blow was long and looping. The knuckles hit

O'Henry hard and drove him from his horse. He landed on his side on the ground. His horse trotted away, stopped. O'Henry sat up.

Colton had his gun out. Ed Garlan sat quietly with both hands on the fork of his saddle. Skinny Marsh was smiling. O'Henry spat blood. He looked up at Colton's naked .45. "Carry on for me, boss."

Garlan said one word. "Kid!"

Up on the slope, a rifle spat once. Colton's horse lost his knees and went down. Colton left the beast, falling. Now Ed Garlan had his own gun out. Colton turned, started to raise his weapon.

Garlan said, "Don't."

Colton looked at Garlan. Then he looked up at the rocks. Kid Harris came down, rifle alert. He said, "I should've dropped him; not his horse."

Colton put his gun away. His face was the color of a dirty saddle-blanket. O'Henry got to his feet. Skinny Marsh was still smiling. The Cerveza segundo looked long and hard at Skinny Marsh.

"Know me next time you see me, O'Henry?"

"I think so." O'Henry's voice was too low. "I know so."

Garlan spoke roughly. "Colton, get up on O'Henry's bronc with him. Then you two get off this grass. You can come back later for your saddle off this dead bronc. You can come on this graze on one condition. And that is that you work Cerveza cattle off my range."

"You got the top hand now." Colton spoke angrily. "But there might be another time, Garlan. I'm sure of that."

O'Henry got into saddle. He left a stirrup loose and Mack Colton found it and rose. O'Henry turned the horse and they rode west again. Ed Garlan and Skinny Marsh sat and watched them and Kid Harris stood with his rifle butt resting on a rock. "We outguessed them," said Kid Harris.

"This time," said Garlan. He smiled and looked at Skinny Marsh. "You ol' fat slob, I didn't think you had that much shove."

Skinny grinned. "I got mad," he said.

CHAPTER VIII

KID HARRIS went back into the hills. He would run the cattle down, heading them toward the riders below. They would take them and push them west onto Beer Bottle grass. The cattle were wild.

They were of mixed bloods: wild stock, native to Mexico, and long-horns that had drifted down from Texas with traildrives. And to Garlan, it seemed they had inherited the worst traits of each breed. One thing was definitely in the favor of the Bar S: the cattle were so wild that when they sighted a rider, they would hightail hell-over-hoof for a distant range.

They were, of course, moving them west. Therefore, if the cattle sighted a rider behind them in the east, they would light out toward the Pacific, the direction the Bar S wanted them to run.

They had decided to work the north end of the range first. Over the ridge, Hightail Smith was toiling with horse and bullwhip. Garlan could hear the malicious crack of his cowpuncher's wicked bullwhip, although he could not see Smith.

He had expected no co-operation from Colton and O'Henry. Kid Harris rode up. "Some twenty head of Alvarado cows back yonder, Ed. They're tame stock. What'll we do with them?"

"Keep them separate from Cerveza stuff. Head Alvarado cattle into a separate herd. I got a hunch the old fellow will either come after them or send a foreman and riders over to work with us."

"Hope you're right. We're short handed."

Skinny Marsh was across the basin. Garlan glanced at the obese man, then grinned. Marsh had really dumped O'Henry out of saddle, and dumped him hard. He let his thoughts dwell on that incident.

O'Henry would never forget that. Garlan remembered the bleak hell in

the Irishman's eyes as he sat there on the ground. He remembered how Skinny Marsh had looked, too. Skinny had been estimating this heavy Irishman carefully and reading the danger in him. Skinny was a veteran of these long trails.

The country was brushy with much *chamiso* and *mesquite* and *manzanita*. They wore leather breast-shields on their horses to keep the catclaw from gouging their forelegs and shoulders. This was a country where a man had to have *tapidores* on his stirrups, too. These protected the rider and also the bronc.

Wild cattle moving through a rough country. With slants that a man could dump a bronc on and pick himself up yards away from his tumbling horse. This country needed tough broncs and good riders, and Garlan had them in his Bar S crew.

And all the time, you rode with one eye on the skyline. He had no trust for either Colton or O'Henry or their crew. Cattle were coming down off the hills and trotting west. Cows with calves and longhorn steers ready to fight if a bronc pressed them too close. Garlan uncoiled his bullwhip and lashed a big four-year-old steer over the rump. The whip beat the fight out of the critter. He turned and ran, bawling against man.

Kid Harris hollered. "Two riders coming from the south, Ed."

SKINNY MARSH was riding up on the slope. Garlan saw him go into a clump of olive trees and they hid him. The fat man was taking up a guard-post, hidden up there. Garlan drew in and waited. Harris could not be seen now; he too had sought hiding. Garlan grinned: these were good men to have in a tight.

Maria and Mono rode up. Garlan let himself relax. The girl said, "Hello, *Senor* Garlan."

Garlan waved a hand. Maria watched Skinny Marsh and Kid Harris leave the brush and keep on hazing cattle. He said, "*Como estan, muchachos,*" and Maria introduced him to old Mono. The old man's eyes were quick across Garlan, then sur-

rendered and held only the reflection of dull time.

Garlan looked at Maria. "The honor is mine, *Senorita*. I am sorry that you came when we worked cattle. You were to the *hacienda*?"

"Si."

"Dynamite did that."

She looked at him quietly. She was stunned, he noticed. The breath went out of her, came back. "That good old house. The people it has sheltered, has loved. They did that to that house; they broke it because of greed."

Garlan was silent. Mono was silent.

Maria said, "We saw some of your mares back toward the *hacienda*. They are nice horses. There was a little colt with them. His legs were still wobbly, he was so new." She looked at the cattle. "Cerveza cattle?"

"Going home," said Garlan.

"You need riders," grunted Mono.

Garlan said, "I could stand a few more."

Mono spoke. "My *patron*, Don Alvarado, he will send over riders to gather his cattle. I see that you are cutting Alvarado cattle to one side. That is good. His men will come tomorrow, I understand."

"*Gracias.*"

Maria said, "Morto is fighting for Juarez, the reports say. Maybe by this time, he has taken that place."

"Your father?" asked Garlan. "How will he stand, when and if Morto comes into *Baja California*?"

"He will be all right, *senor*. Already Morto has sent him personal assurances of that point. My *padre* had always treated his *peons* with great respect. *Senor* Pancho Morto knows that. His spies have brought him that information. Perhaps he will want some cattle for his army but that is not a point to differ over."

Garlan smiled faintly. No, that would be no point to differ over; Morto would just take the cattle. "One thing is, he won't ride any of my horses. Not that I could stop him, but using a mare about to foal is not much of amount for a fighting man.

Or a mare with a colt following her is no good, either."

"He has horses, I understand."

Juarez was way to the east. Many miles of desert and sand and mountains separated that city from Tecate and Ensenada and Tia Juana. But Morto, if he took Juarez, would run along the border to Mexicali, then go still west to the Pacific. This was a foregone conclusion. He had taken the rest of Northern Mexico.

There would probably be a few tough fights. One would be at Mexicali, where there were stationed a band of government *rurales*. Tecate also had a few *rurales* but they would probably pull back west to Tia Juana, there to join the *rurales* of that town.

"The *rurales* are building a ditch around Tia Juana," said Maria. "They are getting ready to fight when and if Morto's men come."

"They will come, *senorita*," Mono shook his aged head in slow thought. "Morto will win. He will win because his cause is just, because his cause is the cause of the *peon*. Too long have large land-owners held *peons* in slavery. Too long have they treated them as a cowboy treats the slinking coyote. Too long have they worked them long hours for a straw pallet and a few *frijoles*. Only your father—God rest him—is good to his *peons* here in *Baja California*. *Dios* would that Morto not harm him."

"He is papa's friend."

"Come," said Mono suddenly. "We talk enough. We will help the *Senor* Garlan, *hija*."

THE OLD MAN rode up the slope, leaving Maria with Ed Garlan. They worked cattle the rest of the day, and Garlan had to admit that Maria could sit a saddle. She had been raised on a horse and she knew horses.

The hours ran away into the distance. The sun stood straight up. They had jerked meat in saddlebags and they shared this with the two Alvarado riders. They rested an hour on the banks of a nameless creek. Water purred and gurgled, rolling in swift little whirlpools.

"There will be much rain this year," said old Mono. "There are ways an old man can tell. It will come early and stay late and next summer will see much dried grass. You do well to get these cattle off your grass as soon as possible."

They did not change horses. They were sitting tough horseflesh and they did not press their broncs too hard. All they had to do was scare the Cerveza stock out of the brush and point them west. The frightened cattle did the rest of the work as they ran in wild disorder.

"They are afraid of men," said Maria.

Garlan looked at Skinny Marsh and winked. "You'd be afraid of men, too, if you had been treated as mean as those cattle have been. Every time a man has laid a hand on them, he has hurt them. Branding them and ear-marking them and doctoring them for ringworm and blackleg. They have reason not to trust a man."

Maria smiled devilishly. "What man could be mean to me?"

"You said something there," agreed Skinny.

Sometimes they had a hard time cutting Alvarado cattle from the Beer Bottle stock, for some of the Alvarado dogies had grown wild, too. That was where the riding came in. They got into saddle and rode out again. By dusk they should have reached the western edge of Bar S ranch, according to Maria and Mono. Behind them they left the Alvarado cattle.

Garlan liked to work cattle. He was tired of the long trek with his mares. It was tiresome work trailherding critters across a long distance. This work was different. This was fast work, a horse running across a flat; then a man could pull in, take it slow until another wild bunch hopped out of the brush.

Some of the bulls were ringy and wanted to fight. One stomped and put his horns down. He had a wide set of horns, one of the widest Garlan had ever seen. But Maria was wise to working this type of critter.

While the bull stared at Garlan, horns swinging in anger, Maria sent

her pony in from the side. Before the bull could whirl and face her, her doubled lasso had landed hard across his high back. The whack was loud as the rawhide *riata* stung the ornery bull.

The bull bawled in pain. He pivoted, ran for her, but her horse side-stepped. Garlan saw his cue. When the bull ran, Garlan came in with his bullwhip talking. He lashed the brute across the sides and over the back, the whip talking in the still air. The bull had enough. He broke.

Again, Maria rode close, *riata* working. The bull had to much now. With both riders tailing him, he loped out of the brush madly. He tumbled over a boulder, landed on his chest, and then got up bawling and running.

MARIA LAUGHED until tears showed in her dark eyes. The wind whipped her dark hair across the back of her jacket. Her one braid had become undone and she swiftly rebraided her shiny hair.

"Poor Mister Bull. Now he has no faith in himself, or in man. He is like *Senor Colton*, now. He trusts nobody, not even himself."

Garlan looked at her. "You think Colton doesn't trust himself, huh?"

She waved a hand flatly. "*Si.*"

Garlan gave that brief thought. Maybe the girl was correct. They went back to working stock. But yet the Bar S owner kept her words in mind. He kept thinking of Colton and Sean O'Henry. O'Henry would never forget what Skinny Marsh had done to him, and he would never forgive.

For O'Henry, despite his laughing, blustering nature, was dangerous. His bluster, his braggadocio, would more aptly fit a coward, Garlan knew. To the casual observer, to somebody who did not know O'Henry's true nature, he would appear as a swaggering braggart.

But that was just Sean O'Henry's way. Underneath, he was tough. He was like a vein of gray steel ore cropping out of a mountain. When the sun hit it, the rays were reflected; they danced and shimmered, al-

most merrily. But under that glimmer, under that reflection, was the hardness of steel, cold steel.

And Ed Garlan knew that. While Mack Colton showed his toughness, Sean O'Henry hid his. And of the two *renegados*, Garlan wondered who was the tougher. He did not know for sure. Each reacted differently to set situations. Colton would be less apt to pack a grudge. When he fought, it would be in the open. O'Henry differed there from his boss.

For O'Henry, to gain a point, would use any means on hand—he would fight openly, he would fight under the board. While Colton had hardly any scruples, O'Henry had less. He would use any means to gain his objective.

"Your thoughts?" asked Maria. "Are they worth a *peso*?"

"Not *uno peso*, *Senorita*," replied Ed. "Not even a *centavo*."

Skinny Marsh waited up ahead, big on his horse. Mono sat beside him. "This is your boundary line," said the old Mexican. "This creek is your west boundary."

Ed looked at the waters. "Tomorrow we work north of here." He looked at Skinny. "Wonder how Pedro is making it in Ensenada?"

"Too early for him to be back," said Skinny.

Mono spat. "We go a *casa* now, *senores*. Tomorrow, as I said, our riders will come. Tomorrow you will see us."

Garlan thanked them for their help. Maria looked at him and he caught her glance and she looked away. Skinny Marsh caught the gesture. While the two Alvarado riders rode south, Skinny nudged Garlan in the ribs.

"Wish she'd a smile at me that-away," he said.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN MACK Colton and Sean O'Henry left the Bar S, they rode north toward Tecate. O'Henry rubbed his jaw slowly and Colton grinned. "Hurt?" "Ever have a horse kick you?"

"Not in the jaw, no."

"Well, maybe he kicked you in the seat of your levis. Well, transfer that kick to your jaw, and you'll see how I felt. And how I still feel, for that matter."

Colton smiled.

"Nothing to laugh about," said O'Henry testily.

Colton growled, "Don't ride a tall horse, Irishman. 'Cause if you do, somebody'll front foot him out from under you. A bullet can stop a man as big as Skinny Marsh just as well as it can stop a man the size of Ed Garlan. Fact is, Skinny'd be a mite easier to hit than Garlan."

O'Henry glanced at him. "What about our cattle? They'll come back. He can pen them up. There ain't much law around here. Fact is, the closest law office is the *jefe* in Mexicali, and he never gets this far away from his jug and doorstep. But under Mex law, I understand he could do that."

"Let 'im pen 'em," growled Colton. "We'll bust them loose, and we might pry a horse or two out from under one of their men. That would be to our advantage, I figure. Dark night and dark riders and guns."

O'Henry shrugged. He kept thinking of Zona Alvarado. He kept thinking, "I should leave her. She's too damn good for me. She's got good blood and she's a good woman. She deserves something better than I can give her." Yet all the time he knew he wouldn't. He had known his share of women; he had loved just one. When he had met her, the others had become names, and names only. Then these changed and faded into memory, like flowers fade when the sunshine and water has left them forever.

They would go on this way. For how long? He didn't know. He only knew one thing: one of them—or both of them—would have to break this pattern soon. That was one of the laws of life. Nothing endured. Men changed, the world changed, situations changed. And this had gone too long.

She was worried about him, and she had justification for such worry. There was trouble here in Baja Cali-

fornia. He packed a gun and others carried guns, and no grass was free. Each claimed land and grass, and each was right to a degree. Cattle didn't care whether they grazed on Bar S grass or Beer Bottle grass. Only the men who claimed this grass cared.

Dark night and dark riders and guns.... A bullet could cut a man down and dump him dead on this grass. And then what about Zona?" What about the Argentina? For one second, Sean O'Henry thought, "I'm afraid, I'm a coward." And then he knew this reasoning was false.

He was thinking of Zona. He was thinking of her future, of her love for him. That filled him with a great pride. And then, he thought of Skinny Marsh. He remembered how Marsh had knocked him to the Mexican sod.

"You'll pay for that, you fat devil," he thought.

Colton said, "Come out of it, Sean."

Anger flared across the dark Irish eyes. "You hire me and my saddle and my gun. You don't buy my thoughts."

Colton glanced at him. "You got a cocklebur under your blanket," he said.

O'Henry thought, "Does he know about me and Zona?" He thought not. He wanted nobody to know but he and Don Diego Alvarado's daughter. He did not want to hurt the girl. She had conceded him enough—maybe too much, he realized.

THEY LOPED along the trail. A roadrunner came out of the brush and traveled ahead of them, his legs working as he ran. When they got too close, the bird lifted his wings and glided a little. Then he would settle down again to his old job of running ahead. They watched him without speaking.

They came to the ridge, and Tecate lay straight north, five miles away. Mount Tecate had a brush fire at its base. Neither did more than glance at the smoke along the foot of the mountains. Brush fires were common occurrences in this section. Sometimes they were started by lightning.

Other times, *peons* started them to burn off the brush so they would have more grass for their goats and few cattle. Also, with the tops burned down, the tuberous roots of the *chamiso* plant lay easy victim to a adze or hoe.

The Mexicans would grub these roots for winter fuel in their 'dobes. The easiest time to get them was ahead, when the rains would make the soil wet and the roots could be easily pulled out. On clear day, after the rains, you would be able to see entire Mexican families—papa, mama and the *muchachitos*—out on the sidehills grubbing the roots and piling them in baskets to be transported back to the cabin.

They met the woodcutter, a giant dark man, who came with two empty burros. Colton asked, "*Como esta?*"

"*Esta bueno, Senor Colton.*"

O'Henry said, "Why waste breath on him?"

Colton scowled. "A man can't play too many cards," he said. "Felipe is out alone, day after day, cutting *pinon* for sale in Tecate. And he might see something sometime that a man might like to know about."

"You miss no angles," said O'Henry.

The seller of *dulces*—the candy peddler—was crossing the mainstreet when they rode in on a lope. He carried his sugar candies on a tray on his head. Colton almost ran him down. The man dodged, his tray slipping. Colton laughed and rode on. The man raised a brown fist and cursed him.

"He'll have a job picking up that candy," growled the Beer Bottle owner.

They went into the *Cantina Americana*. Redhaired Katie Ryan was washing glasses. She said, "Hello, men."

They went to the bar. Colton said, "*Mescal*, honey, for me. Give my partner here a shot of whiskey."

Katie looked at O'Henry's jaw. The Irishman grinned. "Horse kicked me," he said. "Horse by the name of Skinny Marsh."

Katie looked at him with make-believe disgust. "You boys, you'll nev-

er grow up." She poured their drinks and restored the bottles back on the shelves. "They fooled you the other day. They never left town. They ducked through the alley and came in the back door. They were standing in here when you rode out."

Colton growled, "Why didn't you get word to us?"

"How could I?"

Colton glanced around. He saw nobody. He walked back into the kitchen. The place was empty. He looked in Katie's bedroom.

"Stay out of there," stated Katie.

Colton shut the door. He grinned like a big boy. "All right," he said. He came back, went behind the counter, poured himself and O'Henry another drink. Then he walked back around to the front of the bar.

"What'd you know, Katie?"

"They need beef," said Katie. "Morto needs beef."

"How do you know?"

"One of his scouts just walked out of here ahead of you. Juarez has fallen; the rurales have given up. Morto's turning this way. He's heading for Mexicali. But he needs beef in the bellies of his *peons*."

O'Henry grinned. "We'll furnish that beef, Katie. Where is this scout now? Did he leave town?"

"I saw him an hour ago, I guess. He intended to ride to the Beer Bottle, but I told him to wait until dusk and see if you two didn't drift into town. He'll be back directly."

"Give me a bottle," said Colton.

WITH THE Beer Bottle man carrying the whiskey, they went to a back room, Sean O'Henry walking behind his boss. Katie stayed with her counter. They took chairs and drank out of the bottle, not using glasses. The place had a desk and four chairs and was clean, the floor without dirt. Pictures hung on the wall. Colton looked at one that showed a heavy man wearing long mustaches.

"Looks like John L. Sullivan."

O'Henry smiled. "Prob'ly one of Katie's relatives. When you see pictures on an Irishman's wall—or an Irishwoman's—you can bet your last

peso they're pictures of his ancestors. We Irish are worse than the Chinks that way."

Colton looked at the other pictures. "Sure a hell of a homely bunch to have hanging on the wall each day looking at you. Suppose some of them hung from the end of a rope, Sean?"

O'Henry shrugged. "Might be."

Time ran by. The line on the bottle steadily sank. They got a deck of cards from the desk and played seven-up. Colton was growing disgruntled, the whiskey showing on him. O'Henry was the same: happy, good-natured, heavy. Katie came in. She had another bottle. She set it down beside the almost empty one.

"Where is this hombre?" asked Colton.

"Siesta."

Colton swore. "You mean he's sleeping while we wait for him? And him with a revolution going on?"

Katie smiled, patted his head. "Be good, mama's boy. This is Mexico, not Arizona." She left.

O'Henry took a hand. The wait went on. Finally they heard boots in the hall and the door opened. Katie and a dark, small Mexican entered. He was a dandy with a thick *bando-lier* over one shoulder, a red and green and yellow *sarape* over the other. He had a pistol stuck inside his silk shirt and his boots were polished. He bowed. "Senor Antonio Mario at your service, sir."

Colton growled, "Sit down, Tony, and forget the acting. You're not on the stage now; you're in a revolution."

The Mexican looked at Katie, spread his hands, and sat down, visibly annoyed by Colton's brusqueness. Katie winked at O'Henry.

"You want beef?" asked Colton.

"Si, we need *carne*. Need it immediately."

"Where do you want it delivered?"

"*Tres Pinos*."

"Three Pines." Colton rubbed his hands together slowly. "Hell, that's a hundred and a half miles from here. We can't take time out to drive these cattle that far. Not with this *Yanqui* Ed Garlan pounding up on the rump."

O'Henry grinned. "On the jaw you

mean, Mack," he corrected.

Mario scowled darkly. "All right, we do this. You take the stock to Canyon Creek, *si*? My *hombres*, they take over from there. Is that all right with you two?"

Colton nodded. "*Los dineros*? The money?"

"When the cattle are delivered." They argued over prices. Colton had them, he knew; Mario gave in, took his price. O'Henry listened with half an ear, watching Katie Ryan, who missed nothing.

O'Henry said almost cynically, "You figured out your cut yet, Katie?"

"To hell with you," declared the woman.

Mario got to his feet and bowed again. O'Henry yawned and said, "You missed a good set-up there, Colton?"

Colton looked inquiringly at him.

The Irishman yawned again. "How about some horsemeat, Mario?"

THE MEXICAN studied him. "Down in Sonora, *Morto*'s raiders ate horse meat. *Bonita*, they liked the steaks, too."

"The Frogs and the Heinies eat it over the Pond," said O'Henry. "Yeah, and I'll bet some of the Limeys, and my Green relatives, wish they could anchor their eye teeth into a good horseflesh steak."

Colton said, "You got something, Sean," and his eyes showed admiration. He spoke to Antonio Mario. "We deliver horses at the same price—no, a cent a pound less. There's more weight to a horse, too. One horse'll feed more bellies." He looked at O'Henry, who was dozing in his chair.

"Easier to drive, too," said Mario.

The Mexican sat down again and they bargained again. Shadows were long when the *Morto* man left the *cantina*. Colton and O'Henry went to the lunch counter where Katie served them.

Colton looked at the shadows creep across the rutted street. *Muchachos* were hollering as they played hide-and-seek in the dusk and the coolness. Colton was quiet and thought-

ful. He liked this the day with its coolness, its loneliness. It fitted into his nature, his character.

"Your grub," said Sean O'Henry.

Colton took his fork.

Katie said, "Pedro Malone is in town, men. He rode over from Ensenada. He bought some lumber here and Miguel Conchas and his son are going to freight it out to the Bar S."

"Building up again..." murmured Colton.

Katie said, "You finished a deal with Mario?"

Colton looked at her red hair. The light shimmered on it and gave her face an almost wistful look. She seemed girlish suddenly. He wanted to lean across the counter and take her hand, but he didn't.

"He's taking horse meat, Katie."

CHAPTER X

PEDRO MALONE had had a long, hard ride. In Ensenada, he had met with little luck. There had been a little sawed lumber in the single lumber-yard. The proprietor had told him it had come from the *Estado de Washington*, up next to Canada in the United States. It had come from the State of Washington by boat.

Pedro didn't care how it came or where it came from. He looked at it and scowled—it was a meager supply, a good wagon load. But it wasn't bad lumber. Resaw stuff, for the most part; but it would make good finish lumber. A man could use it for door jambs and window frames and casings.

He bought that for Ed Garlan, made arrangements to have it hauled to the Bar S, and the man who hauled it said he and his *hijo*, a sleepy-looking boy of twenty, would work for *Senor Garlan*. *Tres pesos* per day, he said. Pedro bargained him down to two pesos. That was a dollar a day in American money. Besides, the Mexicans would bring their own tools and wanted *Senor Garlan* to give them a bit of *pan*—bread—and some beans. Pedro agreed to those terms, too.

He bought everything he thought

they would need—nails, spikes, some door hardware, some window panes. He left his tired horse with the workman and got one of the man's *caballos*. The workman, Carlos Estaban, said he would lead the horse to the Bar S. Pedro checked the list of things he needed, found he had filled all he could in Ensenada, and hit across to Tecate.

Darkness found him close to the *Mission de Santa Clara*. He spent the night on a bed furnished by the *padres*. Next morning, he took the food given him by the Fathers, and was on his way again, his horse refreshed by a night's rest and plenty of hay and a mess of oats. He thanked a *padre* and was on his way again.

The ride was long, the terrain rough, and he did not press his bronc too hard. He was glad to be back in his native *Mejico*. Here people knew how to live and enjoy life. When the hot part of the day came, then there was the *siesta*.

Up North, people worked too hard. Their lives were too hurried up, too jumbled. They worked when the sun was roaring hot. Pedro remembered the old saying, "Only a fool or an *Americano* works when the sun is high and warm."

He reached Tecate at the start of the *siesta*. *Peons* lay in the shade of the oaks and *manzanita* brush and dozed. A woman called, "Come *compadre*, and rest, for the sun is wicked."

"You are too fat," said Pedro. "When I come to a good looking young girl, then will I leave my horse."

She cursed him good-naturedly. When he reached Tecate, *peons* dozed with their backs against the 'dobe walls, the canopies of plank shading them. There was no wind, no sound. Dogs and men slept.

Pedro went into a *cantina* and ordered cold Mexicali beer. "I am not used to this *siesta* business," he told the barkeeper. "I am from across the Line, and there we work during the heat."

The man went down the bar to tend to the wants of two *Americanos*, each of whom carried a pack and a

rifle. They talked for some time and Pedro caught a few words: *Morto... Juarez... Mexicali*. The two drank and paid with American coins and left into the hot sunshine.

The bartender returned. "Morto needs men to run guns, *senor*. Those two men — those *Americanos* — they go to join him. I am getting men for him."

"Not me," said Pedro. "I have enough trouble as it is, without getting more. I work for Ed Garlan."

The bartender nodded understandingly.

"I have enough war," declared Pedro.

"You will have more, when Morto comes."

"Not with us," corrected Pedro. "We will work with Morto. We came here to raise horses; there is no grass for us in the States. Morto will leave us alone; we have nothing he wants. *Por Dios*, a man would not ride a mare about ready to foal!"

HE LEARNED from the bartender where the lumberman lived. When he went down the street, he saw Mack Colton and Sean O'Henry come in from the south. Tecate was stirring back to its slow tempo. He came to the lumber-yard at the edge of town. The owner had one small pile of lumber and he dozed in its shade. Pedro stirred him a little with the toe of his boot.

"You sell lumber?"

"I have some, yes."

Pedro looked the lumber over. He bought it all. Then wrangled, as usual, over the price. Pedro remembered that in the States a man set a price, a fair price, and held by it. Here they set an exorbitant price and then wrangled down to a fair price. This was tiresome, he figured, and a waste of breath and of time.

"Who will haul it for me?"

The man scratched a match on the hardened sole of his bare foot. "Miguel he does that kind of heavy work. He has a strong back."

Pedro found out that Miguel's last name was Conchas, and that he lived on *Calle Margarita*. He found the adobe and found Miguel greasing the

wheels of his ancient wagon. Dirty children stared at Pedro. One asked, "You bring us *dulces*? You bring candies?"

Pedro had purchased some sugar candy from the candyman and he distributed that evenly among the happy kids. Miguel pushed a wheel on and spun the nut on the axle before tightening it with the clevis pin.

"You like the *muchachos*?" asked Miguel.

"At a distance," said Pedro. He added, "At a great distance."

"They are like the rain," said Miguel. "They just come."

Pedro had to wrangle again. Finally, Miguel agreed to haul the lumber out. He would start in the morning. He would be out to the Bar S with it at night, anyway. He would stay sober and get the lumber out there.

Pedro went to a *cantina* and had another beer. The place was cool — the floor had just been sprinkled with *agua* from the well. Pedro had another beer. He felt like he wanted to fight. He got off his stool and took a chair and broke the leg on it. The bartender stared at him.

"Now I break other leg," said Pedro.

One by one, he broke the legs. He took them and snapped them between his hands; he did not bend them across his knee. This finished, he threw the ruined chair into the corner, took out an American dollar and laid it on the bar. "For another beer and for the chair."

The bartender's scowl changed to a smile. "You are a strong man," he said. "I have never seen a man stronger."

Pedro smiled widely.

He stayed longer in the *cantina* than he had intended. For when he stepped outside, it was getting dark. He got his horse and headed south toward Hacienda Creek and the Bar S, forty miles away. He should reach the ranch sometimes around midnight, he figured. He had taken five bottles of beer along. He opened one with his teeth on the outskirts of Tecate. Before he could drink out of it, a voice called from the *chamiso*. He stopped and looked at Miguel Con-

chas, who had come out of the brush.

"You hide from your wife?"

"I wait for you," said Miguel. "I have bad news."

Pedro joked. "Your woman going to have another *muchacho*?"

"More serious than that, *senor*. I cannot haul your lumber."

Pedro scowled. By some verbal prying, he got the information out of Miguel Conchas. Colton had been to see Miguel. With him had been the wild Irishman, Sean O'Henry. They had talked to Miguel.

"They tell me not to haul this lumber," finished Miguel.

Pedro Malone was angry. He drank deep of his bottle and Miguel looked at it hungrily. "You get none," stated Pedro flatly. "You are not a man; you are a louse. If you were not a louse, I would step from this *caballo* and break your back with my two hands."

"But, *senor*—"

"You are a coward. You are afraid of Colton and the Irishman. Me, I have Irish in me, too. I am afraid of nothing."

"I am afraid not for myself. I am afraid for my *espousa* and children."

Pedro snorted through his beer. "Get out of my sight."

Miguel disappeared back in the brush. Well, he'd been man enough to tell him, anyway. Most men would have dodged around and lied until they had been pinned down to the truth. Pedro looked back down on the slow lights of Tecate. He debated about riding back there and trying to hire somebody else. But he doubted if he could. Probably all the *peons* were afraid of Colton.

Then he remembered Carlos Estaban in Ensenada. Estaban would haul to the Bar S from Ensenada; he would go into town for this lumber. One of the Bar S men would go with him for a rifle-guard. Pedro killed his beer and flung the bottle into the brush and gave his pony the spurs.

NIGHT WAS with him when he gained the high ridge. From here he had his last look at Tecate before going down the southern slope. After that, he rode the pony for all he was worth. He was a tough *grulla*,

with a lineback, and he was as ornery and hard as a burro.

The night had sounds. Once he heard a rustle in the brush, heard a twig snap. That would be a white-tail deer, the mule deer. They were big deer and they would make fine venison. He made a mental conclusion to shoot one for meat in a day or two. He saw quail, too; they soared into the night, invisible but noisy.

With the advent of the night, the *grulla's* pace shortened, but Pedro Malone was in no hurry. He finished another bottle of beer. The desire to break things had passed. The beer was pleasant but not driving. He tossed the bottle into the brush. The hour was growing late, the night dark.

He got sleepy. He had not slept well at the *Mission de Santa Clara*. For one thing, there had been a roof over his head; he had not liked that too well. He wanted to see the stars when he woke up at night, not look up at a dark ceiling. Then he had been in a church, and that bothered him.

He let the *grulla* fall to a fast walk. He dozed with his head limber on his chest. Another hour went by and the time for another beer was at hand. He opened the bottle by bracing his teeth against the cap and loosening it. He spat the cap out on the trail. An ironic thought touched him. A man could trail him by those bottle caps.

He heard a rider ahead.

The rider came from the south. He called, "*Quien va alli?*" and added in American, "Who goes there?"

The rider drifted past. There was no answer. There in the darkness, Pedro Malone thought he recognized the rider as a woman. But *por Dios*, no women rode a range at this hour, what with Pancho Morto and his raiders always in the background.

He did not know that the rider had been Zona Alvarado. Zona had been to a distant line-camp, acting on the chance that Sean O'Henry might have been in that vicinity. But he had not been there; the ride had been useless. She was tired and without hope, for hope was running out of her as the night progressed. She rode hard and used her spurs. What if Don Alvarado

had had occasion to call into her room and found her gone? But if this occurred, she could make some fabrication, a convincing tale.

She came into the Alvarado hacienda at midnight. She did not take her pony into the barn. She stripped him by the lower corral, put the saddle on the corral rail, and turned the horse into pasture.

There was a dim light in Maria's room, despite the hour.

Zona drew back into the shadow of a pepper tree and looked at that light. It went out. She stood there for some time. She went on the long, dark porch. She took off her boots and carried them down the hall. Her room was locked and she opened it and went inside and slowly undressed.

She lay in bed for some time before sleep came.

CHAPTER XI

PEDRO MALONE came into the Bar S shortly after midnight. Kid Harris challenged him on the rimrock and Pedro gave him his last bottle of beer. The Mexican saw a cigaret coal glowing in the shadows as he stripped his bronc. He laid his saddle on the ground and the grulla trotted off to drink and graze. Pedro walked toward the cigaret, long arms swinging.

"Whose grulla?" asked Garlan.

"Carlos Estaban's *caballo*. Tomorrow Carlos and his *hijo*, Carlos Segundo, haul out lumber from Ensenada. They work on new house, too."

Squatting beside Garlan, the Mexican rolled a cigaret, wrapping the raw tobacco in a corn husk. He told him about his trip to Ensenada and its results; his ride to Tecate, and how Colton had scared out Miguel. There was a silence.

Pedro took his eyes away from the glowing cigaret and looked around him. That huge mound under the blankets, over by the *chamiso*, would be Skinny Marsh. Beyond him was another pile of bedding, a smaller pile. That would be Hightail Smith. Pedro returned his gaze to the cigaret.

"Los Caballos, the horses? Where are they?"

"Scattered around the range," said Garlan.

"Maybe Colton, he run them off?"

Garlan drew on his cigaret, then threw it away. "We have to take that chance. We ain't got crew enough to hold them in a bunch. Besides, they've got to graze; they're leg-tired."

Pedro wished he had a beer.

"You go to bed," said Garlan. "I'm sitting here debating whether to wake Skinny up or let him sleep. We need some body on guard."

"I'll stay up."

"You hit the sougans."

Pedro moved off. Garlan said, "Barbwire? You find any of that?"

The Mexican stopped. "You mean, we build a drift-fence?"

"We'll have to. Beer Bottle cattle are coming back on our grass."

Pedro debated. Beer Bottle cattle That made his thirst worse. Well, he'd settle for a drink out of the creek before going to bed. "There is wire in Tecate. Lots of it, I understand. We could cut straight *pinons* for posts. When Carlos Estaban comes, he can haul it out."

"This Estaban? You think Colton can scare him?"

Pedro considered. "He's too dumb to be scared," he said.

Garlan settled back. He watched the Mexican go to his bedroll, unstrap it and roll it out on the grass, the tarp between the blankets and the damp ground. The creek murmured and sang. Pedro went and got a drink and then pulled off his boots and slid into bed. He rolled over a number of times and then settled down. Skinny Marsh was snoring softly.

Garlan rolled another cigaret. He drew in the smoke and liked its taste and odor. He heard a horse neigh in the distance. He looked at the outlines of his sleeping hands. He rolled the cigaret between his fingers and thought.

When morning came, Alvarado men would drift in, according to Maria, and he was glad for that; one enemy on this grass was enough. He wanted peace; not war. All his life,

he had lived on the edge; he had known danger and its companion, death. He had hoped by moving into Mexico that he would get on peaceful graze. The opposite had been true. Colton was here.

But there had been nothing for him in the States. True, he was mortgaged to the ears; but here, he had some future. He did not care to build wide. He only wanted to hold what he had bought, the old Riviera land grant. He had no greed. He had seen what greed did to a man; he wanted none of that.

But, when they pushed you, a man fought back. He got to his feet and got his horse. There was no sleep for him now. He rode to the rim rock where Kid Harris called to him. He got down and walked to where the cowpuncher hunkered in the rocks. Harris still had a little beer and he offered it to Garlan.

"Where'd you get that?"

"Pedro."

Garlan sighed, "Pedro and beer. Pedro and cerveza. He ought to get a job on the Beer Bottle iron for Colton."

"Wish we had a hand there," said Kid Harris

GARLAN SAT down flat. He had his back against the boulder. He pulled his palm flatly across the dust. The soft smell of the wet sandstone lay in his nostrils. He liked that smell. He liked the feel of dust on his hand.

"That would be a good idea," he said slowly. "But who would it be? Colton knows us all, now. None of us could hire out as a spy."

"Just a thought," said Harris.

They were silent for an hour. Garlan let his head fall a little and he slept a few minutes. He came awake suddenly. Harris was still there, hunkered and dark. "You snored yourself awake," the rider said.

Garlan was silent.

Harris picked up a handful of dried dust. Here the rain had not landed, due to the overhang of the rocks. He let this run through his palm onto the ground. The odor of it was musty in Garlan's lungs.

"When a man gets silent in the

night, it makes him think." Harris spoke carefully. "And sometimes I think a man thinks too much for his own good."

"You couldn't accuse Pedro of thinking."

Harris turned that. "He's smart enough," he said.

They sat then in silence. The night slipped across the span of time, moved aside to let daylight come in. Shadows crept out and broke up and turned into light. It was chilly and Garlan felt the bite of the weather. Rain would come soon and break up that chilliness and turn the range green.

Now the men were stirring below them along the creek, and the ruined walls of the old *hacienda* stood like sentinels in the dawn behind them. Kid Harris got to his feet and gave the range one long hard look. Horses were grazing in the distance and beyond that was another bunch, down in the east.

"This grass'll put fat on them," said Kid Harris.

Garlan pushed his hand out. "Cerveza cattle drifting back," he said.

The cattle were moving east again. They had crossed the creek and were on Bar S ground again. Harris said, "They might be Don Alvarado's stock.

Garlan let his shoulders fall. "Don't think so, Kid."

Skinny Marsh hollered, "The chuck is ready, gents," and waved to them. They went down the slope, sliding a little. The big man hunkered over his pans on the open fire. The fire was good and warm. The coffee warmed a man, too.

Hightail Smith said, "Riders coming."

They broke over the ridge at a long trot. Garlan recognized them: Don Alvarado, Zona, Maria, and two other riders. He lifted his hand and they came in. The don held his horse and looked at them.

"You left home early," said Garlan.

Garlan looked at Zona, who had lines around her mouth. Maria smiled and looked across the hills. The two *vaqueros* sat motionless saddles.

"It was still dark when we left," said the don.

THEY CAME down and had coffee. They had saddlehorses in the rail enclosure below the old *hacienda* and Maria ran them into a corner where the Bar S men caught them. Skinny Marsh washed the tin pans in the creek and poured the remainder of the coffee on the fire.

"That might explode," said Kid Harris. "It's strong enough."

"Get t'hell outa here," said Skinny.

Don Alvarado was range-boss. Garlan had asked him to boss the work. He did this for two reasons: he wanted to cement a deeper friendship with the old don, and he wanted his advice on working this strip, for the don knew this country well.

They decided to work south, putting Alvarado cattle south and Beer Bottle stock to the west. Many Cerveza cattle were on Bar S range but they were close to the border line, not having had time to drift in deep. The old man split up the riders and they went to work.

"Your daughters?" asked Garlan. He winked at the old man.

"We can work cattle," said Maria. Zona only smiled.

Kid Harris said, "Come on, Zona," and they loped north to their ground. Skinny Marsh rode up. His household chores were done. Each carried jerky and *pan* in his saddlebags for the noon meal. Skinny and Hightail rode as a pair and Pedro Malone, scowling widely, rode off with Don Alvarado.

Garlan looked at Maria. "You and me ride together, I guess?"

"Will that be hard to do?"

Garlan smiled. "Not too difficult, lady."

He took the ridges that were thick with buckbrush and wild rosebushes. She took the valleys. They started working cattle. They worked good as a pair. Garlan put them down slope and she turned them and cut them, taking Cerveza cattle away from Alvarado stock. She rode a fast, sharp-turning horse and she sat a close sad-

dle. Garlan watched her from a hill. She would do.

The dawn changed into forenoon; the sun lifted across a sky without clouds. Sweat rolled down the shoulders of Garlan's pony. He held the horse, conserving his strength; the afternoon would be gruelling. He rode down to a creek and watered the horse. Maria saw him and came across, riding under live-oak with spray rising from her horse's hoofs.

"You are tired?" Her brows arose. "Already?"

Garlan said, "Don't tease me, woman."

She held her horse in close. Garlan got up. He put his horse around. "Now we'll—" He looked at her suddenly. Her lips were open a little. She was dark and this was around her, giving her color and depth. He didn't intend to kiss her; but he did.

She said, "Please, *senor*."

Garlan sat quietly. He said finally, "I'm sorry, Maria."

Her lips had been cold.

He said, "You're worried about something?"

"You can tell?"

"I've watched you closely the last few days. I think you are worried. Maybe I'm wrong; maybe I don't know you well enough."

"I am easy to know."

He waved an impatient hand. "You are a woman, Maria; no woman is easy to understand. My father told me that years ago. I didn't understand fully then what he meant. I do now."

She put her hand on his and said in mock sympathy, "You poor man! I feel sorry for you."

He looked at her. "You'll forgive me?"

"For what? For doing what you wanted to do? Heaven forbid, that is nothing to ask forgiveness from?"

Garlan smiled. "We better work cattle."

THERE WERE not many Alvarado cattle on Bar S range. Evidently the don saw to it that his stock stayed on his grass, not on the feed of his neighbors'. They worked the range fast. They covered twen-

ty odd miles the first morning. When they met at noon, their horses were tired.

Garlan said, "They won't have much this afternoon. They left most of it back yonder."

They were on the three-way boundary of the Bar S, the Cerveza, and the Alvarado ranchos. Zona said, "We have horses across the creek. I saw a herd there the other evening. Saddle horses." She looked at her father.

"Find them."

Maria rode with her. The men loafed in the shade of the oaks and soon Skinny Marsh was snoring. Kid Harris shook him. "Not that, Skinny. It's enough to have to look at you without listening to you."

"To hell with you," said Skinny.

But he didn't go to sleep again. They waited about twenty minutes. Then Zona and Maria came over the hill, driving about twenty head of Alvarado horses. They were all well-broke saddle-stock and therefore rather tame. They held them in a bunch while the don walked up to them, one after another. He put ropes around their necks and led them back, giving each of them a fresh mount.

They turned their spent Bar S broncs north onto range, hazing them toward the general direction of their headquarters. The ponies of the two girls and the don were driven south with the rest of the horse herd found by Zona and Maria. They rested and hit leather again. The don was wiry in the saddle as he gave out orders in his quiet voice. Again Garlan took to the buckbrush and the ridges. Here were fewer Cerveza steers and more Alvarado stock. They worked the country quickly and by dusk Garlan and Maria were riding toward the scheduled meeting place, a *peon's* adobe on a creek.

"Sell out your thoughts?" Garlan asked the girl.

"You were right, *Senor* Garlan. I am worried. I am afraid to tell my father. I am the only one who knows."

Garlan was silent.

"You are my friend?"

He said, "I hope so, Maria." He wanted to tell her he would like to be more than a friend. But he had

made one rash, impulsive step this day, and he didn't want to make another.

"Maybe you can help me?"

"I'd like to try."

She bit her lip and looked at her hands. "I feel so helpless, *senor*. I love Zona so much. I am afraid she will be hurt, and the pain will be great."

She talked in a low voice.

CHAPTER XII

ZONA MET Sean O'Henry in the darkness of the beginning night. They sat along the bank and listened to the quiet murmur of the creek. The Irishman laughed deeply, hands around his knees, for he was happy with this woman and this night.

"They have horses," said Zona, "on the east fork of *Manzanita* Creek. They have a few hundred head there."

O'Henry nodded.

"I saw them yesterday," said Zona.

O'Henry said, "One more week, *muchacha*, and we go. What will your father say to you leaving with me?"

"He will not like it."

The Irishman considered that. "We could run away and write to him from *America del Sur*. We could let him know by letter." He cocked his heavy head to one side as though listening to some unheard counsel. "But that would not be right; I would not want our daughter to do that to us when we get old."

"We have no daughter yet, simpleton."

"You had better ride back," he said. "The night will be late when you reach your casa. I will go part ways with you."

She kissed him, body close to him.

He said slowly, "Please, *muchacha*, do not make it too difficult for me. After we are married, this will be different. But until then—"

She drew back. "I'm sorry. I like you because you are so clean and good. You will be good to me. I know that. We shall be happy together if—"

"We shall be happy," he assured.

She was cold, and the night was warm. She was afraid of tomorrow

and the day after that, and she would be afraid as long as they were on this range. He was laughing again, laughing almost silently.

"I am not good," he said. "I am a *renegado*, a thief. I am not clean. I have fought and used my gun."

"Those days are gone?"

"Are they?" He spread his thick hands. "No, they are here. They will be gone only when we point our ponies toward Ensenada and the boat that will take us out of *Mejico*. They are not gone."

"Come, we must go."

They rode for miles in silence. The night was dark but they knew these trails, and their horses were old to this country and its turns. They came to Boundary Creek and the man drew in there. She turned her horse and he said, "*Buenas noches, Zona*."

She said, "Goodby," and put her pony into the water. He watched the darkness of her move into the night's darkness, and he heard the splash of her horse's hoofs until he reached the far bank. He heard the hoofs find earth and they moved away and then there were only the night and his thoughts.

The night was dark and so were his thoughts.

TWO HOURS later, he rode into the *Cerveza* yard. Men were standing beside horses—horses saddled and ready—and he left his bronc and found earth. "A fresh mount," he told the *mozo*.

Colton found his stirrup. He went up, saying, "Well, Sean?"

"*Manzanita* crick. About two hundred head, I guess."

"You rode over there?"

O'Henry looked at him. "How in the hell would I know they were there if I hadn't been on *Manzanita*?"

"Just a question. Hang onto your saddle."

"You talk like a damn fool," said O'Henry.

The *mozo* led up a black gelding. "Here he is, *senor*," O'Henry reined him and found his seat. "This way." They rode out on a lope, four men. They all rode dark horses. There

would be no moon. The stars were clear. They looked so close that they seemed only a few miles away.

They were silent. O'Henry led with Colton behind and to his right, with another man abreast him. The fourth trailed. They reached the hills and these enfolded them. They crossed a foaming creek that pushed toward the ocean. They were on Bar S grass. They swung south of the ruined, blasted *hacienda*. Still, nobody spoke. They ran across a flat and came to more hills. Wind was in the *pinons*. They scared a drove of wild hogs that had been grazing on acorns dropped that fall and now deep in the moist earth. The hogs squealed and ran and went into the *manzanita*.

"Pork," said a man.

He got no answer. Still, they rode on, riding at a lope. This ran on and another man said, "Will they have a guard out, Sean?"

"No. The range is too big."

"That is good. I was thinking of my Lupe."

Colton laughed with a flat meanness. "You men and your damned heifers! A woman only gets a man in trouble."

The rider shook his head slowly. "I know that, Mack, I knew it then, but what good does it do a man to know something, and then not use that knowledge?"

Sean O'Henry kept thinking of *Zona*.

Colton said, "We've been on the trail long enough. We should be there."

O'Henry was laughing. He sat his saddle and laughed. Colton looked at him in wonder. "Why do you laugh, you damned fool?"

"I am happy tonight. I thought of those soldiers of *Morto*, and that they would eat Bar S mares. Tough chewing, they'll make. They'll think it is tough longhorn beef. They'll never know they are eating a horse."

"What's funny about it?"

"You're not Irish," said O'Henry. "You couldn't see humor in it. You live too close to the ground."

"A bullet won't hit me so easy, then."

THEY REACHED the ridge and wind whipped in, cold with the night. Clouds were moving in and blotting out the stars. Wind sang in the scrub-oak and the *pinons*; a nightbird whirred across space with wild freedom. O'Henry pulled in and waved his arm. The wind pressed his buckskin jacket close to his heavy body.

"They are here close?"

One man said, "I heard a horse neigh."

Colton spoke. "Mares with colts are to be left behind. We run them hard for a few miles; that will take the edges from them. O'Henry, take Jim and ride the right; Mike and I take left flank."

"Hope there are horses ahead," said Mike.

"There'll be broncs." O'Henry spoke with assurance. Zona had said there were horses here and there would be horses. He was suddenly glad they were stealing Ed Garlan's broncs and not Don Alvarado's cattle. He had never liked that idea; neither had Zona. But both had agreed that the sooner they had money to leave, the sooner they would be together. And Sean O'Henry knew that he could never ask Don Alvarado for his daughter. The don was liberal minded, but not that liberal. They had no other choice than the one they were taking. They had discussed the situation thoroughly, viewing it from all angles. There was no other alternative. With money, they could travel to *America del Sur*; without it, they could never reach a land where they could start together, with one of them starting anew.

Colton said, "Ride tight and keep your guns close," and he and Mike went to the east. Jim said, "All right, Sean," and they went ahead, riding toward the north. They came to a draw. A horse moved ahead and way ahead another neighed. More horses moved. They rode this way for a mile or two. O'Henry saw the dark bulk of a rider and waited, hand on his gun.

"Colton coming in," a voice said.

O'Henry drew his hand back. "Sean," he said.

Colton pulled in close.

"You're an idiot," said Sean O'Henry. "What if this wasn't me—what if I had happened to be a Bar S man? Here you ride in and announce yourself? What if guns had come out, and you'd got away? They'd still have known who you were. You would have told them."

"You got an imagination."

"I damned near dumped you with a cartridge."

"Save that lead for Skinny Marsh."

O'Henry rocked in leather. He rubbed his jaw. "I'm forgetting that," he said. "I'm not pushing it."

"Cold boots?"

O'Henry rode close. "You run your thoughts, fellow, I'll handle mine. You hire my saddle and gun, nothing more."

Colton knew this Irishman, and it was his turn to laugh. "You ride on cockleburrs, Sean," he said. He put his arm around him and hugged him. "Too bad you aren't a woman. If you were a lady, I'd marry you."

Sean was laughing now. "If I was a woman," he said, "I wouldn't be a lady; and I wouldn't be the marrying kind."

Colton said, "Let's hit stirrups."

THEY SWEPT out then, partners in the dark. Somewhere a loafer wolf howled his loneliness. O'Henry thought of Zona. She would sleep now, sleep like a little child; she was his woman, he had her. That was the lightness that cut the night with clearness only he saw.

Horses were on the move. Brush crackled and mares neighed. Mike came in and said, "We got them, Colton," and moved into the night. They headed them east. They were riding quick and fast, beating them when they came close enough. There was no interference save that nature provided in form of brush and arroyo. Colton's bronc stumbled and he brought him up with his weight against the reins. They ran the Bar S horses hard and ran them some great distance.

Riders weaved in and out, shadows among shadows. Colton stayed close to Sean O'Henry. He liked the wild,

laughing Irishman. He wondered how and when Sean O'Henry would repay Skinny Marsh. For he knew that, despite O'Henry's seemingly casual surface, the Irishman would tangle with Marsh, some day and some place at an opportune time.

Or would he?

Colton pulled the damp night air into his lungs. He wished it would rain. Men can move cattle and horses better when it rains, he reasoned. Rain washes out all tracks and cattle and horses are easier to handle in rainy weather. Nice that Mario would take horses instead of cattle. He did not want to hit Don Alvarado's herds too hard; he did not want the don to become suspicious of him.

He did not like the way things were going with Don Alvarado and Ed Garlan and the Bar S riders. He wanted them to fight; he did not want them friends. How could he turn them against the other?

That would be hard to do. Two characteristics of both men were against his plans. Both Ed Garlan and Don Alvarado were level-headed; both had learned to control their tempers, and because they had learned this lesson, their urge for violence had thereby diminished.

A rider came in and said, "The herd is bunched good, Colton. You take the lead, huh? O'Henry an' me'll work the flanks and Jim'll take the drags. We take them to Canyon Crick, no?"

"That's the place?"

"When do we get the *dinero*?"

"Tonight, I suppose. Morto hit some heavy looting in Juarez, Mario told me. I said it took gold."

"Who cuts in?"

Colton felt irritation. This man asked too many questions. "The four of us, of course. and Katie"

"She makes her money easy."

Colton glanced at him. "She plays a close hand; she's a gambler. Lord help the man who falls for her. Her veins have ice water in them."

THEY RAN the horses hard for miles. The night winged past and dawn was coming, and soon morning would be here. *Pinons* began to stand

out on the hillsides and the wind had fallen back the way it does when sunrise is near. They were tired; their horses, too, were tired.

They were fifty miles from the *Cerveza*. They were on the desert south of Jacumba. Ahead reared the rough hills that separated them from Mexicali, to the northeast. They put the broncs around the southern slope of these hills. The Bar S horses had lost their energy. The long trek south from California had taken most of their freshness. The few days on Mexico grass had given them some poundage and strength, but it was of short duration.

O'Henry said, "Not far now, Colton."

The night had pressed on Colton. He had been tough and gay when they had left the Beer Bottle *rancho*. Now he was tough and morose. A man gets too much of the saddle sometimes and when he has to ride through darkness and with maybe a rifle talking somewhere—

"Be good to get there, Sean."

"You'll have time for rest, Colton. They'll cover you some day to keep you in a small spot. They'll put tons on you to hold you down."

"You're cheerful, Sean."

"Long ride back," murmured the Irishman.

A rider came back. "Horsemen ahead," he said.

Colton spurred out. They heard his hoofs leave and finally there came his call. "This way, men."

They circled the herd and stopped it. Riders came out of the dawn with Colton and Mario nodded to O'Henry. O'Henry moved close to Colton and Mike and Jim loafed in saddle, watching the mares who grazed along the canyon. The Morto man tossed Colton a sack of buckskin and O'Henry heard the soft clatter of coins inside.

"Gold," said Mario. He added, "It came from a great *rancho* in Sonora."

Colton did not open it.

Mario waved his hand and his men started the herd east. The *Cerveza* men helped get the herd rolling and then they turned back to the west. The dawn was clear. The day would be hot.

O'Henry said, "I noticed you didn't open that sack, Colton, and count the money. For all you know, it might hold iron washers."

Colton grinned crookedly. "I'm no fool, Sean. I'm taking Mario's count. Me, I don't cotton to that fellow's guns, and he had too many riders." He opened the sack and looked at the gold pieces. "There's enough."

"There's never enough," corrected O'Henry.

CHAPTER XIII

ED GARLAN and Skinny Marsh were riding the south edges of Bar S range when Marsh said, "Four riders over yonder, Garlan."

Garlan took his glasses from their case and put them on the men. The lenses pulled distance short and showed them completely. He looked for some time and then handed the field-glasses to Marsh.

Marsh looked.

"Beer Bottle riders," said the heavy man. "Colton and O'Henry and two others. Wonder why they're crossing our range so early in the morning and so far from their home spread?"

"They've been out all night," said Garlan. "That much is certain. They haven't had time enough to ride from their buildings and reach this spot so early."

They looked at each other. "I don't *sabe* this!" stated Marsh.

"Might've been to Mexicali and spent the night there," said Garlan. "Well, what the hell, anyway? Let's drift."

They were looking to see if any *Cerveza* or Alvarado cattle had drifted back on Bar S grass. They found only one Alvarado steer but Beer Bottle cattle were coming back. Garlan had hoped they would stay on their own range, now that they had been turned back twice. But such did not seem to be the case.

He was fully decided now to put in a drift fence. That seemed to be the only way they could keep Beer Bottle cattle on their own grass, not the Bar S's feed. They swung around

and came into the camping-grounds sometime before noon. Garlan looked at his heavy friend.

"Time that Mexican should have got out here with that lumber from Ensenada, Skinny. Fact is, he should have been out here last night. If he isn't in camp when we get there, we'd better backtrack and see if he's had some trouble."

They loped around a bend. Marsh said, "There's a wagon in camp now; that must be him. Yeah, that has to be him, Ed."

Estaban was a small man with a wrinkled dark face. He had eyes as sharp as points of a gimlet. His son was taller, a little heavier. They shook hands with the Bar S owner and Marsh and Estaban smiled widely.

"Pedro, he tell me that thees Senor Colton, he does not want the lumber hauled from Tecate. We will unload and go after the lumber, Garlan."

Garlan smiled and lifted his hand. "Not so *pronto*, *amigo*. We'll have to unload this lumber first." He walked to the wagon with Estaban following. The *hijo* struck up conversation with Skinny Marsh. "This is good lumber," said Estaban. "All my life, I have built things, and I know my lumber."

"We'll unload after we eat," said Garlan.

Estaban looked at the smoky walls of the ruined *hacienda*. He wanted to know what had happened. Garlan told him that Colton, or somebody else, had evidently dynamited the buildings. The Mexican spread his hands flatly and grimaced. "Such a historical old *hacienda*, *tambien*. Thees Colton, he is a *mal hombre*. Come, let us walk through it and look at it."

They walked through the walls. Estaban ran his practiced eye over the interiors; he pounded against walls. He called to his son to bring his square and level. He tested window openings for trueness and he leveled the wall for straightness. He went from one building to another. Skinny Harris called, "Chuck's ready, men."

"We eat later," said Estaban. "I want to look at this place more carefully."

Garlan watched the Mexican with

interest. He was no carpenter. He knew how to drive a nail but beyond that and the ability to use a saw somewhat, he had no real knowledge of carpentry.

They went through the last building, the bunk-house. Estaban rubbed his hands together thoughtfully.

"There is no use in building new buildings," he said slowly. "I cannot see that use, señor. But, of course, you are the boss—what you say goes with me."

"What do you think?"

The Mexican squatted and squinted his aged eyes. "You can repair these buildings much faster than building new ones, and it will take less lumber. You have walls here. All you have to do is to put new roofs on them and new windows and finish the interiors again."

HE ELABORATED further. With the exception of one building, the granary, the walls were true—they had stood the fierce power of the dynamite because they were so thick. Estaban pointed out that the walls, at their bases, sometimes measured three feet thick. From this thickness they tapered to two feet.

"That is a lot of 'dobe, Señor Garlan. The weight is immense. 'Dobe is like cement; it sets solid. A pick would bounce off these walls. Those walls have turned back Indian attacks. The dynamite could not move them because the charge was not big enough. I would repair and rebuild these walls if I were you."

"The granary?"

Estaban shook his head. "It is beyond repair. The walls on it are sprung and cannot be straightened. There is much work to do, though. Ceiling beams need be cut on *pinon* and doors and windows must be put in. But it would be cheaper and quicker to repair these buildings than to build new ones."

"They're smoked up bad."

"Whitewash will clear that. Or, paint will cover that smoke."

Garlan said, "Repair these then."

They went to the campfire where Skinny doled beef out of a kettle. "Beer Bottle beef," he said. "Killed

it myself with my little pen-knife."

Garlan ate with enjoyment. He had wanted to save the old *hacienda* but he had not thought it possible. He liked the old buildings—they were a thing of the dim past, and they were still good. He turned the entire building over to Estaban and his son. The Mexican liked that.

"We would like a helper," said Estaban. "And could we get Pedro to help us?" He added. "My back is not so strong, and Pedro could lift the timbers."

Garlan looked at Pedro.

"I'll work with them," said the rider. "Only one thing—I do not want to be responsible for any timbers that I break with my bare hands!"

Garlan spoke. "Looks as though we'll all have to take our boots out of stirrups and plant them in the ground. We've got to string wire and build this drift fence."

They ate and then unloaded the lumber. While the lumber was being piled, Estaban was looking over the mess hall. They had decided to rebuild this first because it was so essential.

Estaban's horses were tired. Hightail Smith hooked two big mares to the wagon. They reared and pawed and tried to run away but Skinny Marsh rode on one side and Garlan on the other. When the mares reared, one of them grabbed a bridle and jerked her to earth. Hightail swung the wagon in a wide circle. Evidently one of the mares had been driven before, for she soon caught on to pulling the wagon. The other had tasted the bridle under a saddle, and she also fell into good behaviour. Hightail grinned with the freckles standing out on his dark face.

"Reckon I'm about ready to hit for Tecate, Ed."

Garlan said that Skinny Marsh would go with him. They got their rifles and hit out, running the team north at a wild gallop. They left camp with a yip and a cloud of dust behind them.

Estaban wiped the sweat from his forehead. "Those *caballos* they will not hit that stride for too many miles.

The heat will get them and slow them down."

The mares would stand the trip all right. They were hard from the trail and they still had some months to carry colts before foaling. The long run and hard haul would not hurt them any. Skinny and Hightail would be back tomorrow with a load of lumber and some spools of wire.

Estaban and his *hijo* went to work with saw and hammer. Kid Harris had had some work with a carpenter as a kid, and he toiled with Pedro and the Estabans. Garlan got a fresh horse and rode out. He wanted to scout the country thoroughly to run definite boundaries for the drift fence to take. He did not like barbwire. For one thing, a horse or cow could get cut badly in it; another thing, barbwire brought the end of open range, and that fact, to a rider, was not very welcome.

But the fencing of this grass was a necessary matter. Otherwise Beer Bottle cattle would graze his range bare and his mares, who needed grass badly, would not have enough feed.

He turned back some Beer Bottle cattle on Boundary creek. They had just crossed the stream. He choused them across the water with spray flying and his doubled lass-rope pounding them across the rumps. They hit the far bank on the run and he rode back.

He rode the ridges. From this high point he could see the range below. He had a tough vigilance. Colton would never forget that blow he had given the Beer Bottle owner in Tecate. Nor would Sean O'Henry overlook the beating Skinny Marsh had handed to him. From now on, Bar S men would be ridge riders.

But he saw no trace of the Beer Bottle men. From a butte marred by *chamiso* and *ocotillo*, he watched the Beer Bottle *hacienda* through his glasses. A few riders stirred, coming from the western range. He was so close he could see the geese swimming in the pond back of the barn. Hens clucked in the dust.

H E SAW NO sign of either Mack Colton or Sean O'Henry. He

saw Pinto Martinez drift in from the south. The man stripped his horse and turned him into pasture. Then he walked through the evening to the mess house. Smoke came up lazily from the chimney on that building. The cook came out and hollered. Garlan heard the man's bellow. His belly told him that he, too, was hungry. He went to his horse and rode down the east side of the butte.

The horse braced himself in the loose shale. Garlan looked toward the south. A rider was coming from the direction of the Alvarado *hacienda*. Garlan reached the base of the hill and looked again. He had expected the rider to swung east, but the rider came straight toward him. Evidently the horseman was heading for the Boundary Creek.

Garlan pulled his horse into the brush. When the rider came closer, he recognized Maria Alvarado. He put his horse out into the trail.

"Night will catch you far from home," he said.

She smiled childishly. "Maybe I like to be out late," she said.

Garlan looked at her calmly. He didn't understand her, but he didn't push the subject any further. He looked at the thick braids of dark hair and liked the way they glistened in the sunset.

"I was over to the east this morning," said the girl. "I saw horse tracks cut across a strip of our range."

Garlan frowned. "Maybe some of my horses are drifting."

"I thought so, too. So I followed them. They went straight east into the desert. There had been a wind across the sand, and I could not follow the tracks. The wind had drifted them away."

"Then my broncs went across the desert?"

She shrugged. "So it looked."

He considered that. That didn't seem logical. Horses might drift to the edge of the desert, but they would not cross it unless they were driven. Horses went where there was grass and water. And the desert had neither of these.

"How far away was that?" he asked.

A frown showed on her forehead. "Not too far. Five miles, I guess. That is where our land juts up into your graze."

Garlan glanced at the sun. Twilight would hang on for some time. He was curious. They rode hard to get to the spot before darkness. Maria rode a pace behind him with her horse running evenly. They dipped through an *arroyo*—this was matted with buckbrush and wild rosebushes—and they reached the other side. There was a long level draw and then the desert.

Maria said, "The tracks are up this way," and rode north.

Soon Garlan was looking at the trail. It ran out a ways into the desert and then the sand covered it. He rode north and looked for tracks. Maybe the broncs had turned and come back? But he found no other tracks.

He was puzzled.

Two things bothered him. These horses had traveled bunched, and range horses do not graze in a bunch—they spread out. The other element was that they had turned into the desert.

Had Colton run off some of his broncs? He might do that just for meanness. They turned west again. The night was thickening rapidly. They cut the trail and followed it, and they reached *Manzanita* Creek in thirty minutes.

"Here's where the trail starts," said Maria.

Garlan knew then that the herd had been driven. For he saw the hoofmark of a shod horse...a saddlehorse. His mares were all without shoes. He looked at Maria.

"It will be late when you get home, girl."

She spoke slowly. "It will be morning, *senor*. You see, I am going to watch the Beer Bottle *hacienda*, and to watch Sean O'Henry."

"You wait to see if Zona comes to him."

"Yes."

"That is not a nice job," said Garlan slowly.

"I know it isn't. But I have to make sure they are meeting."

"Then what do you intend to do?"

"I do not like Sean O'Henry. Neither does my father. But evidently Zona does. I think it best that my father know they are meeting."

"What will he do?"

She was silent and thoughtful. "I have given it a lot of thought. I still think it best that he know. Of course, it will hurt him. But it would hurt him worse to have Zona leave without saying goodby to him. And that might happen."

Garlan's tongue had a wry, bitter taste.

CHAPTER XIV

AFTER LEAVING Ed Garlan, Maria Alvarado turned her pony's head to the south. She didn't like the job ahead of her. But she thought her father should know; then, when and if O'Henry and Zona left, the shock would not be so great on him.

For Don Alvarado's heart was not too strong. Zona did not know this, but she knew it. The winter before, the don had been ailing. She had taken him to the *medico* at Mexicali. The doctor had held him three days for examination. He had called in a specialist from El Centro, across the Line.

Together they had compared their diagnoses. Don Alvarado had not heard their combined verdicts; only Maria had been informed of her father's health. The old man's heart had a slow beat and a leaky valve. They would not tell him he was ailing. There was no use of his worrying. Maria had decided against informing Zona, also.

Now she wondered if she had not done wrong by not telling her sister. Zona was the old man's favorite; or so Maria thought. He liked Zona because she was the older, and she was quiet. Maria had been a regular tomboy. When Zona had been working in the house, Maria had been riding the range.

The girl had definite suspicions that Zona was meeting O'Henry. She did not like to spy and pry; she was not that type. But she wanted to

make sure before she went any further. Then she would tell Zona that she knew. They would talk it over from all angles, and decide on what to do—whether to inform Don Alvarado or not.

She was sure that Zona was going to ride tonight. She had had her top horse in the stable all afternoon, feeding him an extra mess of ground barley and lots of green hay. She had polished her riding boots and worked on her split buckskin riding skirt. She had ironed a dark silk blouse, humming as she worked.

"You are happy, *hermana*," Maria had said.

"I'm always happy."

Maria had been disturbed by her own thoughts. She had ridden out on the open range to think. Now, she was going toward the Beer Bottle. She would follow Sean O'Henry out of the *rancho*, follow him instead of her sister. Then when she confronted Zona, she could say she followed O'Henry, not her sister. She did not like this task, but she figured it was necessary.

Although she had a gay exterior, she was deeper than her sister credited her. Now and then Don Alvarado had seen this deepness and it had left him thinking. She reached the hill behind the Beer Bottle. Below her buildings had kerosene lights. Shadows danced and the yellow lamplight pushed them back again.

A dog was barking. She knew he had not scented her; she was too far away. She left her pony and the horse fell to grazing despite the bit in his mouth. She sat beside a rock, her back to the uprising. The rock was still hot although a coolness was coming in.

She felt a drop of rain.

She thought, "I hope it doesn't rain," but she saw the clouds in the west. She had learned something about weather in school in Mexico City. She had detested the science class. But she remembered something about ocean currents changing and the land growing warm and cold due to seasons, and this brought rain to the desert. But she had not paid much attention to the Sister teach-

ing the class.

It started to rain. The drops were large. She had a slicker on her saddle. She put on the dark, shapeless oilskin raincoat. The coat came to her spurs. She settled under the overthrust and the rain dripped down from the rock. Her pony came over and muzzled her and she patted his wet nose.

"Soon, *Pepito*, we will go home."

THE RAIN lost its first anger and settled down to an intermittent shower. She waited for over two hours. Time was endless and it moved on slow feet across this land and its people. She thought of Ed Garlan and that he had kissed her. She smiled. She had wanted to return his kiss, but she played hard to get. She didn't know just what to think about herself since Garlan had come to Baja California. She seemed to have changed somehow. She wondered if she were in love with him?

"*Por Dios*," she thought. "Me, in love?"

Below her, a door opened in a cabin. Light streamed out and the door shut it again, and she could not see the man. She got her pony and worked down the slope. A man rode by, heading west. But it was not Sean O'Henry.

She sat the horse in the darkness, protected by a shed. More time passed and she thought, "I am wasting my time," and she turned to ride off. She didn't know whether she was glad or sorry. Evidently Sean O'Henry, if he were at the Beer Bottle, was not going to meet Zona.

Somewhere, she heard a rider. The horseman was coming toward her. He was going into the Beer Bottle yard and he rode ten feet away. He wore a slicker. She could not identify him in the rain. The lantern light distorted them and made them almost unreal. They talked for a while. One was the old *mozo*; she could not see the other clearly.

They talked for some minutes, looking out at the rain. She was cold and her legs were wet below her slicker. Then the old man turned and went into the barn. For once, she saw

the other man clearly. The lantern's light happened to land on him flatly. The man was O'Henry.

Maria turned her pony toward home. She felt a little relieved. O'Henry had probably been in Ensenada and had just returned to the Cerveza. He had come from that direction. She rode at a long trot. The going was muddy and the road dark and rain ran across it. Rain pounded in angry squalls that made her pony almost turn around. And it was a cold rain. Probably it was snowing on the high peaks south of High Pass.

She was cold when she reached Walnut Creek. The stream, usually dry, was rapid with water, but her pony took it. Suddenly she wanted to be warm. It was still ten miles home. There was a line-camp up the creek a few rods. There would be a stove there and dried oak for a quick fire. She could make some coffee there and warm up. She turned her pony that direction.

Now the rain was behind them. She put the pony in the lean-to barn and went into the small cabin. Line-camps were always left open for any cow-puncher or rider to spend the night in. He was only asked, upon leaving, to have the dishes washed and the place as clean as he left it.

She caught the smell of tobacco smoke.

She had closed the door behind her. She thought, "Is there a man in here?" and that caught at her throat in sudden terror. Her hand on the doorknob trembled. She called, "Who is here?"

THERE WAS no answer. She repeated the question. Then she remembered there had been no horse in the barn when she had ridden in. That meant the place was empty except for herself.

She lit a match. The flickering rays showed the lamp. The match went out but not before she saw that she was alone. She crossed the room and lit another match and the lamp took on from there.

She stood still, smelling. Yes, somebody had just been here; he had smoked a cigaret. Who would stop

and then ride off into the rain? Why hadn't he spent the night here? Maybe one of Morto's raiders had gone through. Morto scouts were working this range. The *bandido* should be close to Mexicali now, she thought.

That was it. A scout had stopped here, cooked supper— She went to the stove. It was cold. Well, he hadn't cooked anything. Then why had he been here? She put oak twigs in the stove and wadded an old newspaper up and put it in with them. She lit the bunch and fire caught. She held the coffee pot under the hang of the roof and filled it with rain water. She came back and put it on the stove. She needed more wood. She went to the woodbox.

She stopped. Something lay on the floor. She picked it up and turned it between her fingers. It was Zona's broach, formerly owned by their mother. How did it get here? Had Zona—

She understood, then. O'Henry had ridden in through the rain, had come from this direction. She put the broach in her jacket pocket. She waited for the coffee to boil, the lamplight dancing from her dark hair. She was frowning a little.

Well, she did not have to spy on them, anyway. She had blundered in on the broach. Wouldn't this damned coffee ever boil?

The coffee drove the chill out of her. She nursed her third cup, looking blindly at the lamp. The night had gone far and it was time to go. She washed her cup and dumped the remainder of the coffee out on the wet ground. She washed the pot, using water that ran from the overhang, and put the pot away. She glanced around the place and found it the same as she left it. There was a pile of straw in the corner. Here the cow-punchers threw their blankets. She saw a mouse sitting on it looking at her.

"Go away," she said.

The mouse ducked into the straw. She went over, intending to kick the straw apart, when she heard the cries of small mice. "She has her family there," she thought. She would not disturb them.

The rain was still savage and strong. She rode faster, pushing *Pepito* with her spurs. She did not have pointed star or saw rowels in her spurs. She had had the blacksmith make her spurs and he had put a *peso* in each one. They would be blunt against a horse; not sharp. Nor would she ride a horse with a spade-bit. She thought them too cruel.

The rain came with a burst, wind pounding it across the hills. She was wet again and cold. Her pony slid and she pulled him down to a slow trot. He knew the way home; she gave him his head.

Hours later, so it seemed to her, she came to the *hacienda*. The place was dark and the dogs did not bark, for they slept in the saddle-shed this sort of weather. She rode into the barn where she left her pony untied in a manger munching oats. When he had finished his oats, he would go outside to graze in the storm in the shelter of the oaks and aspens. Or, if he wanted, he could stand in the barn and eat hay the rest of the night.

When she got to her room, her teeth were chattering. She had hung her raincoat in the barn and her riding-habit was wet. She had not wanted to take the raincoat into her room for that would tell her father, if he saw it, that she had been in the rain. And she didn't want him to know.

She undressed slowly. She hung her clothing over chairs and the foot of her bed so it would be dry in the morning. She did not light the lamp. Rain sounded on the shake-roof and dripped to the ground. She had a feeling of security: this house was old and staunch, and it would turn back the elements.

The blankets were warm to her cold body. She lay and waited for herself to warm. The night was dark and the rain was her only company. She remembered the broach in her pocket.

She had many thoughts. She was so cold she was not sleepy. Yes, this house would turn back anything: rain, snow, sleet and hail. It had turned back the arrows of angry redskins. But it could not stop love or death.

She could see her father lying in his big four-poster bed. He would be small under the covers and he would sleep the way an old man sleeps—his chest would ride a little then fall and rise again. She could remember when she was small and when she had climbed up on the bed, and how she had held her hand over his mouth to waken him. He would grab her and wrestle with her and her mother would laugh. She remembered these little things, there in the minutes before sleep.

Sleep took her thoughts.

SHE AWOKE late. Her father was knocking at her door. She said, "Papa, I am just dressing," although she was still in bed. She did not want him in her room, for her clothes might not be dry yet.

"Wake up, heavy head. Your sister has been up for two hours."

"Is breakfast ready?"

"Si, and the cook is angry."

"She is always angry," said Maria.

Her father's voice was droll. "Most women are that way all the time, child."

She heard his footsteps go down the hall. She found that her riding-habit was still damp. She put on a house-dress and *hauraches* and went down the hall, her heels slapping the floor.

"Must you make so much noise when you walk?" Don Alvarado was in a bad humor. "You sound like a water buffalo in the mud."

She kissed his forehead. "You're an old grouch. I thought you said only the women were grouches? Be careful the way you speak to me, or I'll marry and leave home."

"Who would marry you?"

"Oh, *Senor* Garlan, for one. Then One-eyed Carlos, for another."

"Stop with the first man," said her father. "I like him."

Zona was doing some needlework. She looked up from her crocheting. "If he doesn't treat us right, we'll both marry and run away." She was smiling.

Maria felt suddenly lonesome. Zona acted like she were fooling; Maria knew then she had such

thoughts. She had the broach in her pocket. She gave it to her sister.

"Where did you find that?"

"In the hall this morning."

Zona put it in her pocket. "I must've dropped it sometime last night, I guess. *Gracias, hermana.*"

Maria noticed that her sister's hands, usually strong and capable, trembled as she used her crochet hook.

CHAPTER XV

SEAN O'HENRY liked the rain, liked it because it was turbulent; it had no form or limitations. He thought of it hitting the sand out across the mountains, thought of the wild flowers that it would bring to the surface to shine and glisten a few days before returning to the desert for another year.

When he left the Walnut Creek line-camp, he sat his horse and watched Zona ride toward her father's hacienda. He thought, "Sean, you shouldn't meet that girl," and he knew his mental scoldings were of no use. Nothing could keep them apart. He had promised her one promise.

"One more raid, *linda*, and we go."

"And when will this raid be?"

He listened to the rain on the roof. "Soon," he said. He got to his feet. "Maybe tomorrow night. This rain will help. What man in his right mind—unless he goes to rob—rides the hills when rain runs mad across it?"

"There will not be so much danger for you then. Are you going to get cattle?" He noticed she did not mention whose cattle.

He lied. "Horses, Zona."

They went outside and got their horses and went into wet saddles. Zona turned her horse and rode off and he watched her go. A million thoughts ran through him, and one stood out. She was his woman. That was enough for any man. "Even an Irishman," he thought, and smiled.

He neck-reined his horse and pushed toward the Beer Bottle. He rode as fast as the trail and the weather would permit. He was rest-

less and pushed by many thoughts; he was disgusted with himself. Not for letting Zona fall in love with him, but for the way he treated her. He wondered if there was a bit of manhood in him. He stole her father's cattle; she knew it, too. They were both rather low, and he had said it that night. One raid; no more. One raid, and then *America del Sur*.

But they would not sneak away; he was sure of that, now. He would go with her to Don Alvarado, and he would tell her father. Tell him the way a proud man should tell another man who is proud. And if the don wanted to raise hell, let him raise it. But at least he'd know where his daughter went and he would respect the man with whom she went. He would be certain of that when they boarded the boat at Ensenada.

He had already bought tickets on the boat. It would be a lumber boat, coming down from Seattle, and it would stop for a minute, if a launch hailed it out in the channel. It was bound around the Horn for Buenos Aires.

He rode into the barn. The mozo asked, "*Madre de Dios*, what do you do out on this mad night? No man in his right mind—"

"*Estoy loco*. I'm crazy." Sean O'Henry cocked his head as though listening. The old man stared at him. "Hear those wolves howling in the distance? Hear them through the rain and storm?"

"I don't hear no wolves."

"Can't you hear them? Banshee wolves, running the mountains. Their teeth glisten and saliva drops from their fangs!" He was rocking with quick laughter. The old man looked at him suspiciously and sniffed.

"You been drinking odorless whiskey?"

THE IRISHMAN stood silent while the old man took the leather from his horse. The holster had a bottle and they drank with O'Henry drinking long.

"Want some of that for tomorrow," said the old man.

The rider put down the bottle. "Sure weak stuff." He blew with

pursed lips. "Got a match? See if my breath won't catch on fire?"

"Get out in the rain and cool off."

They stood and talked and finally O'Henry went to the house. He was pulling off his boots when Mack Colton came in. "There's a *Morto* man," said the Beer Bottle *primero*. "He came in a couple of hours ago. Where the hell you been?"

"Out spotting cattle. The rain caught me."

Colton was smiling. "Where are they?"

"Over on *Pinon Mesa*."

Colton said, "*Morto's* taking *Mexicali*. Sure, the *rurales* are putting up some fight; not much, though. Not enough of them. *Kosterlitsky* ran out of *Juarez* into the States, and the *rurales* are done."

"*Morto's* got *Baja California*, then." O'Henry placed his boots upside down so the water could drain out of them. "How will he treat *Don Alvarado* and *Garlan*?"

Colton lifted his thick shoulders. "From what I've heard, *Don Alvarado* is clear—he's been good to his *peons*. *Garlan* is raising horses. *Morto* will need plenty of horses, even three years from now. I think he'll like *Garlan*, unless *Garlan* crossed him."

O'Henry hung his shirt across the back of a chair. "*Garlan's* too smart for that, *Mack*. He's got fists, sure, but he's got plenty between the horns. And it isn't just hot air."

"*Garlan might* cross him, though."

O'Henry hung his wet levis across another chair. He knew what Colton meant: Colton might see a chance to fix things, making *Morto* believe that *Ed Garlan* was against him. Well, let him do it. He'd be gone by then, with *Zona*. Still, a man had to keep up appearances; no use letting Colton know he'd drift soon.

O'Henry slid between the blankets.

"You want to talk with this *Morto* man?" asked Colton.

The Irishman had his last cigaret going. He funnelled out twin streaks of smoke. "T'hell with that border raider. I'm in bed. He wants cattle. All right, we'll deliver them. He

wants cattle, not to look at my home-ly mug."

"You're blunt, *Sean*."

O'Henry turned his back to Colton. The Beer Bottle *primero* got to his feet and walked out. O'Henry heard the door close. He rolled over, held his flat hand upright over the lamp chimney, and blew hard. The palm reflected the wind downward and the lamp went out. The Irishman rolled over again.

Things had played the way he had wanted. Tomorrow night and riders would move through the dark and cattle would run east into the desert. Then he'd seen *Don Alvarado*. He'd talk to him as a man talks to another, and they'd settle this. That made him feel better. He closed his eyes and slept.

When morning came, he ate a late breakfast. The forenoon was clear and he rode to *Pinon Mesa*. There was no need of checking *Zona's* word. She had said there were cattle there and cattle would be there. He just wanted to get away from the Beer Bottle spread. Riders sat around the bunkhouse and gambled and quarreled and tobacco smoke hung in the air. He wanted none of that.

THE TRAIL was clear ahead of him. But the toughest bends, the roughest parts, were still to be traversed. But he would meet them when he came to them. There was no use in pulling at the bit. Only a raw, unbroken horse did that. No use wasting nerves and energy thinking about something.

He made a linecamp and cooked dinner there. He dozed on the bunk and the sound of rain pulled him out of a dim sleep. Rain was running off the roof. He lay and listened to it. His horse was in shelter in the barn.

He was restless, but he held that. He found an old magazine and read it through. Some of the stories were good; some bad. He dozed off again. There was no use in returning to the Beer Bottle. The riders would still be playing cards and grousing and the usual hooraw would be in order. Not that he objected to horseplay. Usually he was the leader in the

rough cowboy sports. But today he wanted to stay close to himself.

Once the rain fell back. He got his bronc and saddled and rode toward camp. He did not know that Don Alvarado was also in this rain. That, even as he rode, the old don was high above him, hidden in the pines on the slope.

Don Alvarado knew he was losing cattle. Although he ran immense herds, he still could tell that, little by little, his stock was being whittled down. He had a hunch that *runners* were operating ahead of Morto's army. These *runners* would be on the outlook for beef. They were freelancers, small time cow thieves. They would steal a few head—about fifty at a time—enough that one man could handle easily on a dark night. But he had lost too many head to blame them on *runners*. He had lost more head than he cared to admit.

One time, a few weeks before, he had seen one of his cows, a brockle-faced roan, grazing with a small herd. The next day, the herd and the roan were gone. He had thought they had doubled back into the hills, but he had not found them. He had given his riders orders to watch for the stock and especially the roan, but the cow had never been seen again.

The day before, he had seen Sean O'Henry and another Beer Bottle rider on a rim, looking across the country with fieldglasses.

Now he had definitely arrived at the conclusion that Beer Bottle men were stealing his stock. Not that he he ever caught them hazing his steers off his range. But he had certain points in his favor: he had seen Colton on his range and then cattle had disappeared and now O'Henry was scouting his grass.

He knew that the Bar S men were not stealing his cattle. His cattle had been disappearing long before the Bar S came. Once he had hinted to Colton that he thought he had lost some head of stock. Colton had grinned and said he must have been wrong. Anyway, he said he wasn't losing cattle; if rustlers were working this range, he'd lose some too. That stood to reason.

Colton was tough. The old don was well aware of that. He had watched Colton at times when the man did not know he was being watched. He had seen the big *renegado's* eyes harden and he read the terrible hardness of the man.

And he knew, too, that sooner or later, Colton and Ed Garlan would clash. And the next time, it would be more than a fist fight. Because of Colton's greed and nature, there was no place for Garlan and his riders on this range. Don Alvarado hoped that Garlan would win.

A number of times he had cut sign of cattle moving off his range. He had followed this sign and usually lost it in some stream or river or out on the desert where the sand was whipped by the wind, thereby covering all tracks. He had not mentioned this to either Maria or Zona. No need, he reasoned, to worry them. But he had taken to carrying a rifle on his saddle and he always had an extra box of short-gun and rifle cartridges in his saddle-bags.

Unknown to Ed Garlan, the don had also watched the Bar S. Don Alvarado was taking no chances. Every man on this range was under his suspicion. But he soon cleared the Garlan ranch of any doubt. Garlan was on this range to stay, unless Colton drove him out. Colton would use a bullet to do that job with, and a bullet has a way of retaliating when another man can also handle a gun.

TWO AND TWO made four...

Sean O'Henry had been on *Pinon Mesa*, and there were Alvarado cattle there. That could mean a raid. Don Alvarado was miserable and cold, and the rain beat against him. It hit his slicker and that turned it, but the cold came through the oilskin and went into his bones. He watched Sean O'Henry ride into the distance.

Don Alvarado sat his saddle and stroked his spade beard slowly. Back of his iron-gray brows his dark eyes were thoughtful. Thoughts were forming in him, grouping and shifting, building a dim, uncertain plan. Why not stake out riders and watch the *Pinon Mesa* herd?

Some of his choice steers were in that region. They were good beef and would bring good prices at the selling-pens in Mexicali and Tia Juana. Logic told him that if thieves did strike, the herd would be one of the best of his to steal. Besides, it was handy to the desert; it was also far from his *hacienda*.

But his men were not gunfighters. Most of them were elderly men; they had been with him for years. Some even had families that lived in Alvarado adobes on various parts of the grant, where they were stationed to watch over cattle. A few of them, of course, were young and adventuresome: they would look forward to such a night venture as this. The don mentally counted these and found he had only three others besides himself. He smiled wryly. He was not adventuresome. When night came, he wanted to go to bed; he didn't want to ride a windy, rainy range. But the venture would be worth the price and something might come out of it.

Then he remembered the crew at the Bar S. All single men and riders who had shaped their destinies, and the contours of their legs, to the barrel of a bronc. They would help him, he felt sure. He rode toward the *ranch* on *Hacienda Creek*. He could not ride fast; the ground was too wet, too slippery. The day was late when he reached the hills south of the ranch. Below him men moved in the dim, uncertain light. He rode down the slope, once lifting his horse by his reins when the animal slipped.

Although it was raining, men were working on the ruined *hacienda*. Garlan looked up. "Morto has taken Mexicali," he said. "He is going against Tecate with his men."

"How do you know?"

"A rider just went through, carrying the word south. They just got it over the railroad telegraph in Tecate. Morto has his men and guns loaded and is coming in by flatcar. Some are riding across the desert."

"There will not be much trouble in Tecate," said Don Alvarado slowly. "The big fight will be in Tia Juana."

"We'll have chuck soon," said Gar-

lan. "Light down and have a bite with us?" He hollered, "Hey, Pedro, put the don's bronc away, will you?"

Pedro Malone shrugged. "That would do no good," he said. "The barn, she has no roof. I could tie him under a big oak tree, though."

CHAPTER XVI

THE MARE left camp at a high mad lope, with Hightail Smith hitting them with the free end of the reins. Skinny Marsh hung to the spring seat, bouncing and jouncing as the wagon lurched toward Tecate.

Very few wagons went over this road. Therefore one trail was worn smooth from saddle-horses; the other, hardly ever traveled, was rough and bumpy. Skinny was on the side where the wheel traveled over the bumps. Once the wagon sagged in a badger hole, and the team snapped the wheels out, the first wheel hitting the hole hard, the back wheel hitting it harder.

Skinny lurched ahead, grabbed himself. He braced his feet against the head-gate boots jammed hard for balance. He swore in Mexican and American.

"What's the matter?" growled Hightail Smith.

"Take it easy."

Hightail grinned and lashed the team harder. They ran even faster. "They named me 'Hightail' 'cause I could hightail a team faster'n any man on a construction job, over on the other side of the Imperial Valley. I'm just living up to my name. How does this pace set with you, Skinny?"

"The pace sets all right," said Skinny. He grabbed another hand-hold on the seat's edge. "The trouble is with me—I don't set so well. Hell, I figured you'd bust the journals off'n these wheels back yonder when you hit that badger hole!"

"These axles are strong. Checked them before I left."

The mares seemed to gain speed and strength. Skinny saw the prairie dog hole coming. The fat man did two things at once. He braced his boots and grabbed with his right hand

Some of his choice steers were in that region. They were good beef and would bring good prices at the selling-pens in Mexicali and Tia Juana. Logic told him that if thieves did strike, the herd would be one of the best of his to steal. Besides, it was handy to the desert; it was also far from his *hacienda*.

But his men were not gunfighters. Most of them were elderly men; they had been with him for years. Some even had families that lived in Alvarado adobes on various parts of the grant, where they were stationed to watch over cattle. A few of them, of course, were young and adventuresome: they would look forward to such a night venture as this. The don mentally counted these and found he had only three others besides himself. He smiled wryly. He was not adventuresome. When night came, he wanted to go to bed; he didn't want to ride a windy, rainy range. But the venture would be worth the price and something might come out of it.

Then he remembered the crew at the Bar S. All single men and riders who had shaped their destinies, and the contours of their legs, to the barrel of a bronc. They would help him, he felt sure. He rode toward the *ranch* on *Hacienda* Creek. He could not ride fast; the ground was too wet, too slippery. The day was late when he reached the hills south of the ranch. Below him men moved in the dim, uncertain light. He rode down the slope, once lifting his horse by his reins when the animal slipped.

Although it was raining, men were working on the ruined *hacienda*. Garlan looked up. "Morto has taken Mexicali," he said. "He is going against Tecate with his men."

"How do you know?"

"A rider just went through, carrying the word south. They just got it over the railroad telegraph in Tecate. Morto has his men and guns loaded and is coming in by flatcar. Some are riding across the desert."

"There will not be much trouble in Tecate," said Don Alvarado slowly. "The big fight will be in Tia Juana."

"We'll have chuck soon," said Gar-

lan. "Light down and have a bite with us?" He hollered, "Hey, Pedro, put the don's bronc away, will you?"

Pedro Malone shrugged. "That would do no good," he said. "The barn, she has no roof. I could tie him under a big oak tree, though."

CHAPTER XVI

THE MARE left camp at a high mad lope, with Hightail Smith hitting them with the free end of the reins. Skinny Marsh hung to the spring seat, bouncing and jouncing as the wagon lurched toward Tecate.

Very few wagons went over this road. Therefore one trail was worn smooth from saddle-horses; the other, hardly ever traveled, was rough and bumpy. Skinny was on the side where the wheel traveled over the bumps. Once the wagon sagged in a badger hole, and the team snapped the wheels out, the first wheel hitting the hole hard, the back wheel hitting it harder.

Skinny lurched ahead, grabbed himself. He braced his feet against the head-gate boots jammed hard for balance. He swore in Mexican and American.

"What's the matter?" growled Hightail Smith.

"Take it easy."

Hightail grinned and lashed the team harder. They ran even faster. "They named me 'Hightail' 'cause I could hightail a team faster'n any man on a construction job, over on the other side of the Imperial Valley. I'm just living up to my name. How does this pace set with you, Skinny?"

"The pace sets all right," said Skinny. He grabbed another hand-hold on the seat's edge. "The trouble is with me—I don't set so well. Hell, I figured you'd bust the journals off'n these wheels back yonder when you hit that badger hole!"

"These axles are strong. Checked them before I left."

The mares seemed to gain speed and strength. Skinny saw the prairie dog hole coming. The fat man did two things at once. He braced his boots and grabbed with his right hand

for the seat and reached wildly for the reins with the other, hoping to pull them out of Hightail's grip. As it was, his plan would have worked, had he reached the reins.

But Hightail pulled the reins sharply to one side. Skinny Marsh missed; the wagon wheel on his side hit the hole. Skinny lost his grip and his balance. He rolled out and on the gravel he landed. He hit the ground sitting down. The last thing he heard when he left the wagon was, "Hey, Skinny, stick aroun'—!"

Hightail swung the wagon in a wide circle and came back to where Skinny stood, brushing the sand from his pants. Hightail stopped the team and started to laugh. The mares, for some reason, stood silent. The next thing Hightail Smith knew, he was down on the ground, with Skinny Marsh sitting on him. He looked up at Skinny's huge fist poised over his face and ready to descend.

"Get t'hell off me! You're heavy as a moose!"

"I'll moose you!" panted Skinny. "You going to be good?"

"Why, I ain't done nothin' yet! I—"

"Answer me!"

Anger flushed Hightail's long face. He was getting his knees braced, ready to push Skinny off, when the mares started to move. "Grab 'em!" he hollered.

The wagon's wheels turned. Skinny had to leave Hightail to hang on to the reins. He caught them just as the mares really got under way. He stuck his high heels into the sand and held them, jerking them to a rearing halt. He was grinning, his temper gone.

"Get up on the seat," he said to Hightail.

Hightail was grinning, too. "All right, papa," he said.

HE CLIMBED up into the driver's side and held out his hands for the reins. But Skinny didn't hand them to him. He told him to move over and do it *pronto*. Hightail said, "Can you drive a team?" in irony.

"Move over."

Hightail moved.

Holding the reins tight, Skinny put a boot on the off hub, and went up into the seat. He settled his heaviness on the springs, sending them almost flat. He adjusted his foot on the brake and loosened the lines a little. "Giddap, damn you!"

The mares had had their run. The fat man also held them under a tight reins. They started off at a long trot; Skinny held them down a little. Hightail Smith spat tobacco juice on a sandstone rock.

"Nice weather," he said.

Skinny squinted at the sky. "It'll rain," he said gloomily.

They went for a quarter-mile or so. The mares, recognizing that their play-day was over, settled down and became good horses. Hightail kept glancing at Skinny. "There's a rock ahead," he would say. "Be careful. Swing to the right. Now, that's it. A little more—"

"I'm driving this team."

"You're doing a poor job."

Skinny had his good humor back. He shifted the subject for safety's sake. "The boss was sort of worried about them horse tracks he saw go out into the desert. Hell, sure as I'm a pound in weight, them horses have been stolen. Now who do you figure got off with them?"

"Who else would it be but Colton and his crew?"

Skinny swung the team around a rock.

"You did all right dodging that one," said Hightail.

Skinny overlooked that remark. "Looks to me like we'll have to have a showdown with this Colton spread, Hightail. Yes, sir, it sure does."

"Garlan's an odd fellow," said Hightail reflectively. "Sometimes he seems to take an awful lot off'n a man; other times, he flares right up. He's always sure of his grounds before he hits, and then he hits hard. But he's been too easy on Colton, I'd say."

"He's got something up his sleeve. When the time comes, we'll hit. Can't be too soon for me, either."

Their banter was light and easy, but under it was a seriousness. Both knew how that showdown would be

staged: with guns and smoke. The rain came in and hit them. They pulled on slickers and hunched over and let the rain hit them. They met a rider coming out of Tecate, about ten miles south of town. The man rode by fast in the rain.

"That gent looked like a Beer Bottle hand to me," said Skinny.

Hightail grunted. "Rode a Beer Bottle horse." Rain went down his neck and he strapped his slicker tighter, cursing in a monotone. "Guess we'll have a month or two of this, huh?"

"So they tell me."

"That's the trouble with California and this country. They get plenty of rain, but it all comes at once. Now if it was just scattered around over the year, with each month getting a little rain, instead of it all coming at once—"

"You do something about it."

They drove in silence the rest of the way. They clattered across a wooden bridge that had turbulent water running under it. The rain ran with angry hiss across the soil. Then it would stop as suddenly as it started. It seemed to be saving energy to pelt them again.

"Wish I had a drink," said Skinny.

They came into town finally and Skinny stopped the team at the livery barn. They helped unhitch and then lead the broncs inside. The hostler had hay and two stalls, and they put the mares into these. He also had a drink of *tequila*. It was a vile brew; yet it was hot.

THEY DECIDED to stay in town over night. They could not make the long trip back because of the mud and the tired condition of the mares. They got rooms at the *Casa Alvarez* and then went to the *Cantina Americano*. A Mexican was drinking alone at the bar with Katie serving him. Skinny introduced himself and Hightail Smith to the red-haired girl. The Mexican glared at him through bloodshot eyes.

Hightail ordered *mescal* and Skinny took whiskey. He admired Katie's pretty back as she reached up for the whiskey bottle and his eye roamed

to her nicely-turned knee. Hightail jabbed an elbow in his partner's ribs. He shook his head in make-believe disgust. The Mexican still glared at the fat man.

Hightail said, "To the rain," and drank. Skinny just drank and said nothing. He caught the Mexican looking at him.

"You know me?" asked Skinny.

The Mexican just looked.

Skinny refilled his glass. He drank again. Katie leaned across the bar and was pretty close to him. Hightail drank again, too. Again, Skinny caught the Mexican's steady gaze.

"What's wrong with him?" he asked Katie.

"He gets so much *mescal*, and he gets an idea he can put an evil eye on a man. He only does it when he's drunk. He never gets mean or quarrelsome; he just fixes his stare on somebody he dislikes. Once or twice he did it to me because I wouldn't give him any credit."

"The eye work?" asked Hightail.

"Not that I know of."

Skinny looked at the Mexican. Their gazes locked and held. The fat man moved close to the dark man, their eyes still locked. "Look hard," he said, "because soon you'll be looking some other place."

"What you mean, *senor*?"

Skinny grinned, eyes still locked with the Mexicans. "Just this." He suddenly picked the smaller man. Holding him high, he carried the kicking, hollering *hombre* to the door. He stepped outside. He pushed and the man sailed and landed out in the sticky street-mud. Skinny turned and went back inside.

"Got a little rain on me," he said, brushing one wide shoulder.

Katie walked to the window. "He's getting up. He's shaking his fist at the saloon. He's trying to get mud out of his ear. Now he's limping down the street." She giggled. "He's all mud and wet."

Skinny smiled. The whiskey was hitting him. He remembered that he was hungry. He ordered ham and eggs and Katie called the order to the cook. Hightail ordered too. Katie took a drink.

"How do you like the new ranch?" she asked.

Skinny answered. "The grass is good and so is the range. Of course, you know that Colton and his gang blew up the buildings, don't you?"

"I heard of that. Are you sure it was Beer Bottle work?"

The whiskey was working on Skinny. "We're danged sure, Miss Katie. And when we move against the Beer Bottle, there'll be glass flying! And that won't be long now, I reckon."

Hightail poured more *mescal*.

Katie was scowling, looking out the window. The cook called and she went in after their orders. They all took a table and sat down, Katie with them. She had a whiskey bottle and a glass for herself.

The place was warm and clean. Both Hightail and Skinny felt the radiance and heat of their drinks. Their clothing was drying out. The memory of the long drive into Tecate faded back before the pressure of good food and good drink. Skinny talked a little too much. He told about the missing herd and how it had gone into the desert.

"Who do you figure stole your horses?" asked Katie.

Skinny said, "Who do you think, miss? Who else could it be but Colton?"

"That's a serious charge."

Skinny said he didn't care either way. They ate and drank and then went to their room where they got a fire going in the heater. They had brought a bottle with them. Katie watched them go down the muddy street.

Her eyes were thoughtful.

AFTER SOME time, she went back into the kitchen. She asked the cook how much wages she had coming. The cook told her she was a day ahead of time; tomorrow was pay-day. Katie smiled and rubbed her hand against her red hair.

"I'm selling out, she said.

The cook stared. "Who to?"

"That Gilzon wants to buy the *cantina*. He was in yesterday asking me if I wanted to sell. I knew you wouldn't want to work for him."

"I won't work for him."

The cook named the amount she had coming. Katie paid her from the cash register and the cook left. The girl packed her belongings in an hour. She sent a *muchacho* to Juan Gilzon, who also owned a *tienda*, a store. The short fat Mexican was puffing from the rain and the mud.

"You want to see me, *senorita*?"

"You offered me a price yesterday for my *cantina*. I'll take it today."

The man's eyes became shrewd. "But today, I would not give as much as yesterday. Today I would give—"

"Get out," said Katie.

Juan Gilzon was silent. Katie went on with her packing. "You leave?" asked Gilzon. "I pay you—"

Katie straightened. "You heard me. Pay what you offered yesterday or get to hell out of here."

Gilzon sighed. "All right, I pay. I write a check."

"You'll pay cash. Gold."

"All right."

The heavy man left. Katie looked around the room for the last time. She had lived here for some years. Now she found herself loathe to leave. She disregarded that feeling with anger. Trouble would start here between the Bar S and the Beer Bottle. Trouble that might drag her into it.

Morto? Sure, she worked for his cause. But what did that mean? Nothing. When Morto got into power, who knew how he would act? Would he remember past favors, old courtesies? Maybe. And maybe not.

"Here is the gold," said Gilzon.

"Count it."

He put the coins on the table and she counted them. She took the bag and got a piece of paper and scrawled a bill of sale, writing it both in American and Mexican. Gilzon left.

She gave the room a last glance. She had sent her gold out—the money she had gotten from Beer Bottle raids—and she had only the money Gilzon had paid her. She got her raincoat and went outside, leaving the door open. Let Gilzon shut it when he came. Carrying her suitcase, she walked the quarter-mile through the ankle-deep mud to the Border.

She merely nodded at Mexican officials. They had no business with her. She crossed through the Gate and went into Tom Bishop's office. He was working on some papers and looked up and said hello.

"Going to visit in the States for a while, Katie?"

Katie stood and looked out the window and down into the valley where Tecate lay in the mist. "No," she said, "I'm on this side of the Line for good. I'm an American citizen, you know."

"Quitting Tecate, huh?"

Katie nodded slowly.

CHAPTER XVII

WITH ESTABAN in charge, construction work started in earnest at the Bar S. When morning came, men climbed out of water-soaked tarps and huddled around a fire built in the shelter of an old wall. There were only five of them: Kid Harris, Pedro Malone, the two Estabans, and Ed Garlan.

"Lucky stiffs, Skinny and High-tail." Kid Harris cupped his coffee cup in his hands to get some warmth. "Bet they slept in a soft bed last night with no rain to keep them company."

"And probably a bottle on the table," finished Pedro Malone.

Estaban was already thinking of the work ahead. "First we will have to get a roof on the mess hall," he said. "Then we can use that for living quarters and cooking quarters. This rain will continue for two months, maybe. Well, it is the same across the Border in California."

Garlan made the Mexican boss of the construction work. He and Pedro and Kid Harris saddled stout horses and rode to the ridge where the *pinons* grew. Estaban had brought two axes from Ensenada. He selected some of the taller pines and marked them as being fit for ceiling beams.

"They will do the job for now," he told Garlan. "Later, when we get on the other buildings, you will want stronger and better beams. The lumber-yard in Ensenada will have some fir and long pine from the States in

a week or so, and we will haul out some of them for the other buildings. But now, to get a roof, we must use these pine, although they are not as straight as we would want."

Pedro went to work with an axe, cutting down the trees marked by Estaban. The carpenter also fell to chopping timber. Kid Harris and Garlan got lassoes on the fallen trees and dragged them down the slope to the *hacienda* where young Estaban was trimming the branches from them.

The ground was wet and slippery and therefore the trees were easier to drag, although a horse did not get as good a footing as when the soil was dry. There were pulling the trees down-hill, too; that made it easier on man and horse.

They got four logs down by the building and Ed Garlan took an axe to help young Estaban peel the logs. Kid Harris rode back up the slope for another log. The rain came and went and the men worked on. Young Estaban was good with an axe, peeling a log much faster than Garlan. But Garlan was catching on. Kid Harris rode back and forth, dragging logs down; up on the slope, the ring of axes was heard.

"This is a good log," said the youth, axe poised.

They worked that way all morning, with the older Estaban and Pedro falling beams, with Harris dragging them down, and with Garlan and the younger Estaban peeling them. Garlan and the young man even placed a few beams across from wall to wall, letting them fall into the niches formerly occupied by the original spans. One end was too large but they trimmed it and it slid into place.

They put tarps across from beam to beam and built a fire in the old cookstove that had, by some miracle, escaped being completely demolished. The tarps kept most of the rain off except where they joined, and here the rain solemnly dripped to the burned out floor. But it was some form of shelter and the stove got hot. Garlan made hot cakes and cooked some bacon, even though it was din-

ner instead of breakfast. He also warmed up some canned beans and made some biscuits. Kid Harris juggled a biscuit. "Feels like you got ground-up lead for baking powder," he ventured.

"Eat it and be damned glad you got it," growled Ed Garlan.

They rested a little, backs against the wall, the stove's heat good, and they smoked cigarets. But the older Estaban was restless. His sharp eyes kept roaming round the building, his plans for construction forming in his mind. Garlan saw that he liked this type of work; that it was a challenge to him and his skill. And, seeing that, he knew he would get a good job of reconstruction of the *rancho's* buildings.

He kept remembering Don Alvarado's story of Sean O'Henry riding *Pinon Mesa*, and of the fat Alvarado steers that grazed there. The don was playing a wild hunch, but Garlan had seen more than one wild hunch play out successfully and repay its owner. Now he told his two riders that, come dark, they would drift out to Walnut Creek, where they would meet the Alvarado men.

Kid Harris rubbed his whiskery jaw. "Might work, Ed." He added, "I sure hope so."

Garlan knew what the lanky rider meant. This weight, this pressure, was wearing them down, was bearing down on all of them. The two Estabans were silent. They were carpenters, the older said; they were not gunfighters.

Garlan smiled. "We didn't expect you to sling a gun, men."

Pedro Malone spoke. "Hope Skinny and Hightail are back by then. We'll need them, I figure."

"They should be in this afternoon," said Garlan.

THE MEN STARTED to work again. Enough *pinons* had been cut for some time, according to the older Estaban, so Kid Harris got an axe and he and Pedro started skinning the bark from the poles. The two Estabans put more of them into place and also started cutting the rafters. They would put sheeting over this and use straw for a roof

until either tile or shakes could be obtained in sufficient numbers to make a substantial roof.

Garlan asked where they would get the straw. According to Estaban senior, wild grass would grow fast; in a week or so, the grass would be tall along the creek, and they would pull it, mat it into bunches, and cover the sheeting, which would be one by twelves placed with six inches between them.

"You do as you think best," said Garlan.

He had seen pictures of such roofs, usually in some geography when he had been a kid in school. He had also seen a few houses in Tecate with reed roofs. There was little he could do here; four men could handle this job as well as five. He got a sorrel and put a saddle on him and rode out on his range.

He was nervous inside. Would Don Alvarado's plan work? Secretly he hoped it would prove successful. This waiting, this planning, was getting tiresome; it was eating into his good nature. So far each time he had moved against Colton, he had hit a blank wall. Something had to give soon.

The rain left suddenly and the sun swept out, shooting light across the hills and the wet brush. He got a ridge and saw the road that led north to Tecate. No rigs moved along it.

Skinny and Hightail would have a tough time hauling lumber over that wicked, slippery road. But they would not reach the *rancho* until late afternoon. They would have to load the lumber and haul it almost forty miles. And that was a big distance in weather like this and on such a road.

Garlan swung his horse, riding toward the Alvarado *rancho*. He came out of the *mesquite*, water dripping from him and his horse, and hit a trail. He followed this for a few miles. He was still on Bar S grass. Then the trail took a turn and he swung west, riding some unseen hunch. He huddled an hour later and watched the Beer Bottle yard below him through glasses.

Rain came in again, sweeping

across this land. No men moved down there but horses were in the horse-pasture. Even as Garlan watched, the jingler came out and circled the broncs, hazing them into the barn. Garlan counted the horses and found out there were nine of them. Would nine riders leave the Beer Bottle at dusk and head for *Pinon Mesa*?

Surely something was afoot. Otherwise, why would the horse-wrangler take in these saddle-broncs? Surely somebody was going to ride them. But when? Maybe he was taking them for tomorrow's saddle work?

While he was watching, a rider came along the road that led to Ensenada. He rode into the yard and left his horse and walked to the *hacienda*. About ten minutes later, he came out, a man accompanying him. This man wore a yellow slicker and he and the man stood by the man's horse and talked for a few minutes, despite the rain. Garlan's glasses told him that the man in the slicker was Sean O'Henry. But the other man was a stranger to him.

The stranger got on his horse and rode back toward Ensenada, twenty miles or so distant. Garlan went to his bronc and found stirrup and put the horse down toward the trail. He aimed at a spot a mile ahead of the rider. He was waiting, horse blocking the trail, when the rider came along. He was a small, dark-skinned man with thick lips that bespoke of Negroid blood.

"*Como esta?*" he asked hurriedly.

Garlan saw that he was surprised, and he hardly blamed him. To come around a bend and find a stranger blocking the path on a rain-swept day—

"Who are you?" he asked.

The man gathered himself. "I come from Ensenada. I work for the Wilson Steamship Line."

"You went to the Beer Bottle *rancho*."

Dark eyes studied him. "How did you know?"

Garlan said sharply, "I know. That's enough. What did you do there?"

"I had a message for *Senor O'Henry*."

"What was its nature?"

"That, *senor*, is our business."

Garlan had his .45 out. He was playing every straw, every whim. Something might pay off. "That's my business, too." He cocked the gun.

THE MAN had nerve. He was silent for some time. He said, "I do not think it will violate my trust if I tell. *Senor O'Henry's* boat is ahead of time; tonight it will be in the channel, and our launch will be ready to take him out. As I said, the boat came ahead of our schedule."

"Where is it going?"

"*America del Sur*."

"How many tickets did O'Henry buy?"

"*Dos*, I believe. Two. I could not say for sure."

Garlan holstered his weapon. "I want to thank you, *senor*," he said seriously. "I am sorry I had to treat you so discourteously. I thought you had information I needed; you had none. Your trust is secure."

The man murmured, "*Gracias*," and wiped his forehead with his hand, running the palm under the rain-helmet. "Now I ride for town."

Garlan watched him ride away. Then he turned and rode toward the Alvarado *rancho*.

Maria, the *mozo* said, was in her room, he thought. Don Alvarado saw him and came to the porch and called. He had wine in a glass and he wanted Garlan into the living-room. The Bar S owner glanced longingly at the warm fire in the rock fireplace and said he wanted to see Maria.

"She is in her room, I believe."

They went down the hall. Don Alvarado knocked on a door and said, "Maria, you have company." He looked at Garlan's wet slicker. "He is as wet as a cow that has swum *el rio*."

Maria's eyebrows rose. "You will come in, *Senor Garlan*?"

"I want to talk to you for a moment or two."

Don Alvarado excused himself, and went back to the living-room. Garlan did not enter the room. Standing in the hall, he told Maria about the man from the steamship company. "I

thought you would like to know, Maria."

Maria bit her bottom lip. "That means that he will come for Zona soon." Garlan saw that lip tremble. There was a solemn chore ahead of this girl, but he could not help her. He was almost a stranger to this family. He did not ask what she intended to do; that was not his business. He had no right to intrude unless she asked him to, and she did not ask.

He went back to the big living-room where he had a small glass of wine with the *don*. He was impatient, restless. He could not stay. He got his bronc again and rode out. He headed north toward the Bar S. He swung wide of the *hacienda*. He remembered Don Alvarado's words: *We will meet on Walnut Creek, your men and mine. From there we will ride to Pinon Mesa.* This range was stirring with harsh undertones planted on it by man and his scheming and greed.

He cut the Tecate road, read it, saw that Skinny and Hightail had not driven past. He frowned and wondered, "Where in the hell are they? We need them tonight." He rode the trail with the late afternoon rain smart against him. He remembered the rider he had seen leave the Beer Bottle when he had ridden north from the Alvarado *rancho*. That rider had been Sean O'Henry and he had been going toward the Alvarado spread.

GARLAN HAD held his horse in the deep brush and watched the man below. He knew he was seeing Sean O'Henry for the last time. He felt no antipathy toward the man. His philosophy had little room for hate. He felt, rather, a pity toward this man; he had almost wrecked his life, and now his love for Zona Alvarado was straightening him out, taking him away from his birthplace. O'Henry had a rough afternoon ahead.

He came out of the hills; ahead of him, lurched to one side, was a wagon

loaded with lumber. Skinny and Hightail were unloading the lumber.

Skinny scowled and swore. "Damn' little bridge went out under us. Look at those uprights, Ed."

Garlan looked at the four-by-four posts. They had been sawed more than half-way through. When the wagon had gone over, they had snapped and shoved the lumber into the muddy draw.

"Sawed off," said Garlan slowly.

Hightail grinned, face dark with mud. "We met a Beer Bottle rider on the road when we went in. Hell, he's sawed these timbers, just to dump us in the ditch. He might've got a saw from some local Mex woodcutter."

"Somebody sure sawed them," said Skinny.

"We got to get to camp." Garlan came down. "Looks to me, there's only one thing to do: that's unload this lumber enough so the wagon can be pulled back in on the road. Then we tote the lumber through the mud and load it again."

Skinny said, "I could cut Colton's throat for this, Ed."

"Save that, Skinny, for tonight."

They unloaded almost all the lumber before the tired mares could pull the wagon back on the road. The team was not used to a steady pull and the mares did not work together; they see-sawed and jerked but got the wagon back on the road again. Then came the job of loading the lumber. They carried planks and two-by-fours and nail-kegs and the spools of barbwire through the mud and reloaded the wagon. The drizzle had turned into rain and the afternoon into dusk before they had the wagon rolling again.

Skinny got on the seat, heavy with mud, and took the lines. The mares had had a rest, and they took up the collar again. The wagon lurched ahead and Hightail caught on the end. Ed Garlan loped beside it and hollered, "We'll see you in camp in an hour, huh?"

"Hope so," yelled Skinny.

CHAPTER XVIII

AFTER ED Garlan had left, Maria Alvarado went back into her room. She stood at the window and looked out at the rain but she did not see it. She could hear Garlan talking with her father in the living-room. She heard him leave and saw him get on his horse. He turned the bronc and rode north at a lope.

She watched him until he was out of sight. That was not a long distance: the wind and rain came in and took him from her vision. She had expected this moment for some months. But she had not expected it to come so suddenly.

Circumstance was moving fast across this grass, piling up and taking significance. The peak was coming; the crisis was ahead. After it, there would be a lull, a period of rest. Grass would grow and cattle would graze and mares would whinny to their new colts. But that would all be afterwards.

She went into the hall and knocked on Zona's door. The girl was crocheting; her needle very fast. Maria closed the door and stood against it. She let some time pass. Zona looked up, wondering. Maria sought for a way to open the conversation. Finally she found it.

"You still have your broach? You have not lost it again?"

Zona looked up. "Yes, I have it. Why do you ask?"

"I thought perhaps you lost it on Walnut Creek again."

"What are you talking about?"

"I found the broach there, Zona. Please, let's get to this. I know you meet Sean O'Henry. I know you love him."

Zona looked at her. "Does father know?"

Maria shook her head.

"How did you find out? And when?"

"I did not mean to pry into your affairs, to spy. But I found your room empty a few times, and I wondered. Then—" She spread her fingers suggestively. She leaned back against the door. "Do you love him?"

"Yes, I love him. I am going with him."

Maria said, "He comes for you at this minute, *muchachita*. The boat is coming tonight; you will leave to-night."

"How do you know?"

"*Senor* Garlan stopped the man who came to tell Sean. I had to have somebody to share my troubles, so I told *Senor* Garlan. When he heard Sean was leaving, he came to tell me. He was just here."

"I saw him ride away." Zona got to her feet. Her needlework dropped to the floor. She put her arms around Maria and hugged her. "What should I do?" She answered the question herself. "I am going to tell father now."

Maria shook her head slowly.

Zona paused. "Why not?"

Maria said, "I will tell him."

Zona said, "*Gracias hermana*," and kissed her. She sat down and put her head in her hands. "He will be hurt, my father. And I love him."

Maria went outside and went down the hall. Don Alvarado was reading in the big chair. He looked up. "You are pale," he said. "You will drink with me?"

Maria poured into the glass.

"Too much for you," said her father.

"Not enough." She put lightness to her words. She drank a little; the wine was good. She drank some more.

"You have something bothering you?" he asked.

She said, "You know me too well."

"You are my daughter," he said.

"You are a damned little hell-cat." He was smiling at her. She kissed his forehead.

"What would mother say if she were here to hear you call me such names?"

"She'd say I was correct."

Maria sat on his lap, her arms around his neck. She laid her head on his shoulder, her hair spilling across him. She looked like a big child, a sleepy child. She got her mouth close to his ear and whispered.

"Daddy, the Book says that when you grow old enough, you leave your

father and mother—you leave your home—and you go with a man that is almost a stranger to you, and you make your own home.”

“Si, the Good Book says that.” He chuckled. “I see through it all, now. You are in love with Ed Garlan. He works fast, that man. He works almost as fast as when I and your mother married—I had known her three days and it seemed like forever. Si, I like him.”

“You once told us—oh, you told us many times—that when the time came that we took husbands, you would be satisfied with our choices?”

He frowned. “Si.”

“It is not for me I speak,” she whispered. “But it is for Zona.”

“Zona?”

“Yes. She is in love with Sean O’Henry.”

SHE FELT A stiffness touch him, then leave. He was quiet, breathing heavily. “He is a *renegado*, a border jumper. The law does not want him, but he rides close to the edge. Are you sure of this?”

“Yes.”

“Zona told you?”

“Yes.”

“Why didn’t she come and tell me?”

“I asked her not to. I made her let me tell you. She goes with him today. Their boat comes into the Channel off Ensenada at dark. *Senor* Garlan just told me.” She told him the rest. The tension had left him and she was glad. The shock had passed and he was normal again.

“Maybe he will not come for her? Maybe this is just a passing whim for him?”

“He will come.”

“You are sure of that?”

“I am. He loves her. She loves him. He will come. He has bought two tickets to *America del Sur*.”

“I will go see her. Come with me?”

Maria hugged him. “You’re grand, papa.”

They went down the hall. Zona was deep in her chair, small and without form. She did not look up. She was crying a little, crying softly. Maria had tears in her eyes but she

made her voice natural.

“Company, Zona.”

The girl looked up. “Daddy,” she said.

Don Alvarado went to her. He knelt beside her and put his arms around her and lifted her face and kissed her. “Maria has told me,” he said. “Why didn’t you come to me and tell me?”

“I was afraid.”

“Afraid of whom? Me?”

“No, I was afraid of myself. I was afraid for him, for myself, for what we had built. I wanted to; I couldn’t. I can’t tell you why. I don’t know myself.”

“You are going to South America?”

“Yes. What chance has he here? He has some money, enough to buy a *rancho*. He has to leave. I am going with him. For weeks I have packed my things, taking only what I need. Each summer I will come up and spend weeks with you and Maria. I promise you that, daddy.”

He was silent.

“Are you angry with me?”

“No.”

“Are you disappointed?”

“Yes.”

“Because I am to marry an *Americano* whose record is not too clean?”

“No. You are a woman. You know your mind and heart. I am sorry because you are leaving. I shall miss you much. But I shall not intrude upon your life. I love you too much to do that. Now go on with your packing. I want to be ready when O’Henry comes.”

“What will you do?”

The don smiled. “He’ll be surprised. But it will be a welcome surprise, I think. Now, Maria, you help your sister.”

He went to the hall and got his raincoat. He put it on and went to the barn. He told the old *mozo* to hook their best team to the spring wagon, the one with the cover to keep off rain.

“You are too old to drive out in this rain,” grumbled the *mozo*.

“It is not for me. It is for somebody who is young and strong—and in love.”

The *mozo* stared at him in wonder as he left the barn. Don Alvarado looked toward the west but no rider came into view. The rain limited his vision to a short radius. He went into the house. He poured another glass of wine and sat down and sipped it slowly, and there was a wide smile across his wrinkled face. He could hear his daughters in Zona's room and they were laughing now and then, but the laughter was, he thought, rather thin and without depth.

MARIA CAME in and left again, carrying something. He did not look up. The girl went down the hall and into her sister's room. They had a trunk in the middle of the room—a heavy trunk bound by hammered copper bands. It had been made in Spain by patient workmen centuries before.

"You were just going to take a handbag?" asked Maria.

"No, we intended to tell papa."

"Where are you to be married?"

"In Ensenada."

"Papa was just to the barn. He sent a rider out and the man rode north. Wait here a minute."

Maria got her raincoat and went to the barn. The old man was shoveling hay into a manger.

"That rider?" she asked. "Where did he go?"

"To the Mission. Surely your father is going *loco*. He wants Father Gomez here. Does Don Alvarado expect to die and does he want the Father to deliver unction to him?" The old man's voice was cynical.

"He wants him for a marriage ceremony?"

The *mozo* stared at her in wonder as she left.

Zona hugged her. "He wants us to marry in the *hacienda*, Maria. Oh, that will be wonderful! But where is the groom? Where is Sean?"

"He will be here."

Maria returned to the packing. She knew what was troubling Zona. Had Sean O'Henry had trouble breaking with Mack Colton? Or had he just ridden off, telling the Beer Bottle owner nothing about his plans?

Maria consulted her lapel watch. Not more than an hour had passed since Ed Garlan had told her about the steamship clerk going to the Beer Bottle iron. Sean O'Henry would have hardly had time to ride over from the Colton *rancho*.

Maria put up a swift line of running chatter designed to take the rawness from her sister's nerves. Outside the rain dropped and then poured as the sudden squalls hit the range. Soon green grass would break from the soil and provide feed for cows and horses and mule-deer and other small range-inhabitants. Zona went often to the window and looked into the rain.

"You cannot see far in the rain," said Maria.

"He has a long ride," said Zona.

"You take this?" asked Maria. She held a dress at arm's length.

The afternoon ran on.

"There is a rider now," said Zona.

But the rider was Father Gomez. He was a riding a burro. He left the animal at the barn and came into the house. He was a short, fat man with a flat black hat. They could hear him and Don Alvarado talking.

An hour went by.

"There comes a rider now," said Zona. Her face was very pale as she watched. Then she said, "Here comes Sean now, Maria."

CHAPTER XIX

COLTON came in. "Who t'hell was that gent that was lookin' for you, Sean? That citified fellow?"

"A fellow I know."

They were in Sean O'Henry's room. The Irishman was filling a suitcase with his clothes. Colton watched him for some time and then asked, "Where you going?"

"I'm leaving. I'm jerking stakes. I've had enough of you and your damned thieving spread."

Colton's face hardened. He went over to the dresser and looked at the two slips there. "Steamship tickets, huh? For two people. South America bound. Who they for?"

"Me, for one."

"The other?"

O'Henry picked up the tickets and put them in his pocket. "None of your damned business, Colton."

Colton's face was the color of dark agate. "You runnin' out on me, Sean?"

O'Henry looked up. "You could call it that," he said. "But I wouldn't call it that. Look, Mack. You hired my gun, that's all. I'm leaving. I've got a bellyfull. I'm so damned low I could crawl under a bullsnake, and he wouldn't have to be traveling over a wagon rut, either."

Colton was dark. "We've got a raid for tonight."

"I'm not in on it. By that time, I'll be out on the Pacific. I'll be going south. Look me up sometime when you hit *America del Sur*. You won't find me. The country is too big and Sean O'Henry's dying tonight. That name is gone."

Colton laid his hand on the Irishman's shoulder.

O'Henry swung low. Colton went back against the wall. He reached for his gun but O'Henry's gun was on him.

"Don't do it, Mack. I'll kill you."

Colton said, "You hit hard."

"Not as hard as a bullet."

Colton took his hand up.

O'Henry had his suitcase packed. He had on a blue suit and a flat-brimmed hat and he'd shaved and put on a clean shirt. He had a red neckscarf with the loose end tucked under his vest. And there was no joviality in his heavy face.

"Mack, I've met the girl I want, the one I want to spend my life with. No, don't laugh, you two-bit renegade! I'm leaving, Mack. I'm never coming back. I'm going south with her tonight."

"That little Mex hasher in Ensenada?"

O'Henry laughed inside at that, laughed silently. But then he sobered suddenly. Far better to let this man think he was running off with the hasher instead of Zona Alvarado. "That's the girl," he said.

Colton smiled. "You're a damned fool. She won't stay with you. She's known too many men." He went outside.

O'Henry pulled down the straps on

the suitcase, looked around the room, and felt a tightness pull across his back. He grinned, took the valise, and went to the barn. He had his own horse saddled and he tied the grip-behind and went up. The rain pounded against his slicker. He met Colton, who stood beside the corner of the bunkhouse. O'Henry drew up.

Colton said, "Well, good luck, Sean."

O'Henry held out his hand. Colton took it. He gripped it hard and stepped back. "I'm sorry about what happened in there, Sean." He jerked a thumb back at the house. "My nerves aren't the best."

Sean said, "I'm damned sorry, Mack."

Colton put his hand down. "Save a range for me down below, fellow. I might need it the way things are shaping up here."

"You'll never leave here."

Colton looked at him inquisitively.

"They can't run you out. Your roots are too deep. You'll either come out as top dog, or you'll be dead. The sign points that way, Colton."

Colton was quiet. Then, "I reckon that's right, Sean."

They had known each other for years. They had shared blankets, grub, and fights, and they had known theivery together.

Colton said, "Don't mention the raid tonight?"

O'Henry looked evenly at him. "Wild horses would never pull that from me. You know that, Mack. You shouldn't ask such a question."

Colton nodded.

O'HENRY turned his horse and rode out. The tight spot had left his spine and he felt gay and carefree. He was leaving the whole damned mess. Then he thought of Don Alvarado. He would have to face him; and he had stolen the don's cattle.

The rain swept in, smashing hard at times, light and fresh at others. He rode a slow walk. Progress was slow in this mud. He was like a small boy going to apologize to a neighbor for pulling the tail of the neighbor's

cat. He was afraid and he wasn't afraid to admit it.

The bright thought was Zona.

Once away from the Beer Bottle *hacienda* he turned southeast. He rode faster, too, for the day would soon run out. He saw a rider on the ridge; he recognized Ed Garlan. To hell with him and the rest of the men on this grass. Garlan claimed a certain amount of this grass—well, he could have it. Keep it forever, for all he cared.

The day was dying when he reached the Alvarado *hacienda*. He rode into the barn, noticing the burro of Father Gomez's not knowing it was the Father's animal; he glanced at the team hitched to the buggy. Don Alvarado was evidently driving somewhere. That meant that Colton's raid on Pinon Mesa would receive no interference from this *rancho*, anyway.

"I'll ride out again soon," he told the *mozo*.

The old man looked at the suitcase. "You are leaving?"

"You ask too many questions."

Sean O'Henry went to the *hacienda*. The porch cut off the rain. The wind whipped around a corner, swinging rain under the eaves. He lifted the heavy iron knocker and let it fall. Don Alvarado came to the door.

"Come in, *senor*."

The room was warm inside, the fireplace cheerful. O'Henry found himself thinking, "I hope we have a home like this down in South America," and he bowed to Father Gomez. "You ride far on such a day, Father."

"The ride was good, my son."

Don Alvarado took his raincoat and hung it up. O'Henry stood beside the door and wondered where Zona was. He looked at Father Gomez. "May I speak to the *Senor Alvarado* alone, Father?"

The Father said, "Certainly, my son. I will go and tease my *hija*, *Senorita Maria*." He left the room.

O'Henry said, "Sir, I am a rider for Colton, as you know. I don't know quite how to say this to you. But I am in love with your daughter, Zona."

"How long has this been going on?"

"Some months, now." The Irish

came through with a crooked smile. "Time flies fast when you love somebody. I do not exactly remember."

"And why are you here?"

He told him about the boat that would reach the Channel that night. Now the dam was broken, and words rushed out. They tumbled over one another and got tied up and he hoped they made sense. "You did not seem angry."

"Where will my daughter and you be married?"

"In Ensenada. The clerk—the one from the company—he will have a Father there. He will marry us." There was a silence. "Then you have no objections?"

"Will you be good to her?"

"Yes."

"Why did not she tell me?"

"I asked her not to, *senor*. I wanted to tell you. This is hard for me; it is hard for you."

"She is a good girl," said Don Alvarado. "All her life she has been a good girl." He held up a hand to cut O'Henry's words off. "No, she has not slipped. I have only one request—and that is that you name a son after me."

Father Gomez had not gone to Maria's room. He had been listening in the hall. He came in. "I thought you brought me out here to conduct a marriage ceremony. *Senor Alvarado*? Yet you stand here and ask to this young man—"

O'Henry saw through it then. He came across the room and grabbed the don. He was laughing, laughing as only the Irish laugh, and he was hugging the man, shaking him and hugging him. "You had this cooked up," he accused. "Who told you?"

"Maria."

"She knew?"

"Yes." Don Alvarado called. Zona."

THEY were married in front of the fireplace. Don Diego Alvarado gave his daughter away and Maria stood with her sister. Afterwards they signed the Bible that had been handed down through centuries. Sean O'Henry signed slowly and then he looked back through the pages and saw the names of other couples, now dead and forgotten except for the

names they had inscribed here. It left him a little awed.

"You have money to buy a *rancho*?"

"*Si Don Alvarado.*"

The don smiled over his wine. "Zona has a fund left by her mother. You may write to me and draw on it when you run low, if you do."

Sean O'Henry remembered how he had obtained that money. He remembered that in a few hours Mack Colton would raid Alvarado cattle on *Pinon Mesa*. For the first, he felt without honor; for the second, he would never tell Don Alvarado. He had a friendship for Colton, and the don would not want him to violate it. He would lose strength in the don's eyes if he told him about this raid. So he was silent.

The boat would arrive in the Channel somewhere around midnight, the clerk had said. They still had time. They had a wedding supper whereat Father Gomez became filled with wine and laughed and talked. The wine loosened Sean, too. But he knew that, underneath, both the don and Maria were not their usual selves.

This he had to accept. He assured himself that under normal conditions the pair would have felt much the same. He himself knew the fullest measure of happiness he had ever experienced. It was as though a new world was starting for him: he was being young and walking into the sunshine again for the first time.

"Is it the wine or ourselves?" he asked Zona.

"What do you mean?"

"Outside the rain comes down. Soon we will be in its cold. But I won't mind it. The whole thing is new—"

Don Alvarado looked at the big clock. "It is time you go. Maria and I and the Father will go with you to *Ensenada*."

"Not me," corrected the Father. "I would only be in the way."

Don Alvarado frowned. "I remember now; I cannot go. You two will have to go alone, unless Maria goes with you."

"Where are you going?" asked Maria.

Don Alvarado had no answer.

Sean O'Henry wondered if the don were going to raid Colton, he remembered the cattle on *Pinon Mesa*.

Maria said, "I'll stay home, too."

Ten minutes later, Zona and Sean O'Henry drove off, the rain thick around them. Don Alvarado looked at the sky. Night was with them. Maria was sobbing a little. "You are sad," he said.

"I am happy."

CHAPTER XX

THE THREE Bar S men—Garlan, Skinny Marsh, Hightail Smith—came into the Bar S grounds with darkness quick on the earth. The rain had started again, breaking down with hardness. The heavy wagon-load of lumber made for hard pulling. The mares were winded. They were tired.

Hightail Smith cursed the elements. He swore at the rain and the mud. He cursed himself for being such a fool as venturing out in them.

"He's happy," said Skinny.

Garlan glanced at the heavy man. Skinny was tired. His thick face was smeared with mud and rain ran off his slicker and hat.

"We got a long ride ahead," said Garlan.

Hightail Smith stopped cursing. "You think they'll be there, Ed?" he asked.

Garlan shrugged. "Damned if I'd know, fellow. But we gotta hope, don't we?" He looked at Skinny. "Morto ought to be in *Tecate* by now, huh?"

"You remember that filly that ran the *Cantina Americano*, Garlan?" Skinny rubbed his nose. "She sure was an odd gal, that heifer. Katie Ryan was her name, huh?"

"So she said."

"Well, me an' Hightail et in there. We was high with everything, and maybe we talked too much; maybe not. Anyway, right after we walked out, she sold the joint. She went across the Border and got a gent to drive her to San Diego, I guess. Tom Bishop was telling us about it."

"Wonder what happened?" asked Hightail.

Garlan struggled. "Who can understand a woman?"

Skinny grinned. "My ol' pappy always used to say that. Guess it held good in his day, too. Get along, you swayback old critter!"

The rain continued. The wagon slipped and lurched, almost losing its load. They reached the top of the ridge and the slope down to *Hacienda Creek* lay tumbling below them, slippery as a hound dog's tongue.

Now the mares were forced to brace themselves to hold the load. They skidded in the mud, rumps against the breeching-straps. Hightail had stopped cursing and reconciled himself with Nature. Skinny heaved on the lines, now this way, now that; he guided the mares downward. Garlan was quiet.

"Well," said Skinny, "We finally got here."

He threw the lines to the older Estaban, who caught them. He drove the wagon over to the shelter of a wall and he and his son unhooked the mares, peeled the harnesses from them, and turned them loose to graze. With the wall breaking the rain, the lumber would not get so wet.

Pedro Malone was cooking some beef stew. Skinny and Hightail got plates and settled down, chewing on Pedro's biscuits. Garlan settled down and thought of the Alvarados. He wondered how Sean O'Henry had fared with the old don. He hoped that the Irishman got out of the country. Because if he didn't leave, sooner or later he'd either get killed, or he'd kill a Bar S man.

Garlan thought of the night ahead.

HE HAD NO taste, no desire, for a pitched gunfight in the darkness and rain. He had seen enough trouble in his life. He had come to *Baja California* to raise horses; he had come to settle down and become a rancher.

He stirred and drank the hot coffee. The heat of it lifted the chill a little pushing the coldness out of him. He remembered things: he remembered the tracks of his horses, going into the desert; the tracks that never returned. He knew that Mack

Colton had run off those horses. Who else could it be?

His logic was simple and complete. Don Alvarado was losing cattle. He, Ed Garlan, wasn't stealing them. Then the thieves must be the Beer Bottle riders. He sipped coffee again. He was wet, cold, miserable. Yet there was a ride ahead and there was darkness. He tried not to think of these.

Pedro Malone scoured a pan, face lined in the lamplight. Water dripped down from a seam in a tarp. Hightail Smith cursed the drips. Kid Harris hunkered and drew little pictures in the dust. Skinny Marsh sat with his back against the wall—the wall marred by soot and marked by the dynamite blast. The heavy man was quiet, waiting for the next dawn.

Skinny got up. "Where do we meet Don Alvarado, Ed?"

Garlan said, "Walnut Creek," and got to his feet. "My knees are stiff."

Hightail Smith had a bottle. He passed the quart around. "Put a fire inside us that'll keep us warm." He got directly under the drop of water and it hit him in the forehead as he drank. "Damn it!"

"Your broncs," said the older Estaban. "We have them against the far wall, *senores*. They are waiting there, and we have already saddled them. We have put a little jerked beef in each saddlebag along with the bullets."

"Might be a false alarm," muttered Skinny.

Kid Harris was pulling on his slicker. "Might be, at that." He was walking out in the rain, following Garlan. They went to their horses, five men in the rain.

They took a length of time tightening *cinchas* to their proper tightness. Kid Harris fumbled with his latigo strap. Garlan took his stirrup and rose. Pedro's bronc was cold and mean and wanted to buck. The Mexican turned him hard by the bit and Garlan rode close, quirt falling. He beat the bronc and this took the fight out of him.

Pedro said, "*Gracias, senor.*"

They left the place on a lope. Garlan glanced back and saw the outlines of the Estabans against the puny fire.

Garlan shrugged. "Who can understand a woman?"

Skinny grinned. "My ol' pappy always used to say that. Guess it held good in his day, too. Get along, you swayback old critter!"

The rain continued. The wagon slipped and lurched, almost losing its load. They reached the top of the ridge and the slope down to *Hacienda Creek* lay tumbling below them, slippery as a hound dog's tongue.

Now the mares were forced to brace themselves to hold the load. They skidded in the mud, rumps against the breeching-straps. Hightail had stopped cursing and reconciled himself with Nature. Skinny heaved on the lines, now this way, now that; he guided the mares downward. Garlan was quiet.

"Well," said Skinny, "We finally got here."

He threw the lines to the older Estaban, who caught them. He drove the wagon over to the shelter of a wall and he and his son unhooked the mares, peeled the harnesses from them, and turned them loose to graze. With the wall breaking the rain, the lumber would not get so wet.

Pedro Malone was cooking some beef stew. Skinny and Hightail got plates and settled down, chewing on Pedro's biscuits. Garlan settled down and thought of the Alvarados. He wondered how Sean O'Henry had fared with the old don. He hoped that the Irishman got out of the country. Because if he didn't leave, sooner or later he'd either get killed, or he'd kill a Bar S man.

Garlan thought of the night ahead.

H E HAD NO taste, no desire, for a pitched gunfight in the darkness and rain. He had seen enough trouble in his life. He had come to *Baja California* to raise horses; he had come to settle down and become a rancher.

He stirred and drank the hot coffee. The heat of it lifted the chill a little pushing the coldness out of him. He remembered things: he remembered the tracks of his horses, going into the desert; the tracks that never returned. He knew that Mack

Colton had run off those horses. Who else could it be?

His logic was simple and complete. Don Alvarado was losing cattle. He, Ed Garlan, wasn't stealing them. Then the thieves must be the Beer Bottle riders. He sipped coffee again. He was wet, cold, miserable. Yet there was a ride ahead and there was darkness. He tried not to think of these.

Pedro Malone scoured a pan, face lined in the lamplight. Water dripped down from a seam in a tarp. Hightail Smith cursed the drips. Kid Harris hunkered and drew little pictures in the dust. Skinny Marsh sat with his back against the wall—the wall marred by soot and marked by the dynamite blast. The heavy man was quiet, waiting for the next dawn.

Skinny got up. "Where do we meet Don Alvarado, Ed?"

Garlan said, "Walnut Creek," and got to his feet. "My knees are stiff."

Hightail Smith had a bottle. He passed the quart around. "Put a fire inside us that'll keep us warm." He got directly under the drop of water and it hit him in the forehead as he drank. "Damn it!"

"Your broncs," said the older Estaban. "We have them against the far wall, senores. They are waiting there, and we have already saddled them. We have put a little jerked beef in each saddlebag along with the bullets."

"Might be a false alarm," muttered Skinny.

Kid Harris was pulling on his slicker. "Might be, at that." He was walking out in the rain, following Garlan. They went to their horses, five men in the rain.

They took a length of time tightening *cinchas* to their proper tightness. Kid Harris fumbled with his latigo strap. Garlan took his stirrup and rose. Pedro's bronc was cold and mean and wanted to buck. The Mexican turned him hard by the bit and Garlan rode close, quirt falling. He beat the bronc and this took the fight out of him.

Pedro said, "*Gracias, senor.*"

They left the place on a lope. Garlan glanced back and saw the outlines of the Estabans against the puny fire.

Garlan shrugged. "Who can understand a woman?"

Skinny grinned. "My ol' pappy always used to say that. Guess it held good in his day, too. Get along, you swayback old critter!"

The rain continued. The wagon slipped and lurched, almost losing its load. They reached the top of the ridge and the slope down to *Hacienda Creek* lay tumbling below them, slippery as a hound dog's tongue.

Now the mares were forced to brace themselves to hold the load. They skidded in the mud, rumps against the breeching-straps. Hightail had stopped cursing and reconciled himself with Nature. Skinny heaved on the lines, now this way, now that; he guided the mares downward. Garlan was quiet.

"Well," said Skinny, "We finally got here."

He threw the lines to the older Estaban, who caught them. He drove the wagon over to the shelter of a wall and he and his son unhooked the mares, peeled the harnesses from them, and turned them loose to graze. With the wall breaking the rain, the lumber would not get so wet.

Pedro Malone was cooking some beef stew. Skinny and Hightail got plates and settled down, chewing on Pedro's biscuits. Garlan settled down and thought of the Alvarados. He wondered how Sean O'Henry had fared with the old don. He hoped that the Irishman got out of the country. Because if he didn't leave, sooner or later he'd either get killed, or he'd kill a Bar S man.

Garlan thought of the night ahead.

HE HAD NO taste, no desire, for a pitched gunfight in the darkness and rain. He had seen enough trouble in his life. He had come to *Baja California* to raise horses; he had come to settle down and become a rancher.

He stirred and drank the hot coffee. The heat of it lifted the chill a little pushing the coldness out of him. He remembered things: he remembered the tracks of his horses, going into the desert; the tracks that never returned. He knew that Mack

Colton had run off those horses. Who else could it be?

His logic was simple and complete. Don Alvarado was losing cattle. He, Ed Garlan, wasn't stealing them. Then the thieves must be the Beer Bottle riders. He sipped coffee again. He was wet, cold, miserable. Yet there was a ride ahead and there was darkness. He tried not to think of these.

Pedro Malone scoured a pan, face lined in the lamplight. Water dripped down from a seam in a tarp. Hightail Smith cursed the drips. Kid Harris hunkered and drew little pictures in the dust. Skinny Marsh sat with his back against the wall—the wall marred by soot and marked by the dynamite blast. The heavy man was quiet, waiting for the next dawn.

Skinny got up. "Where do we meet Don Alvarado, Ed?"

Garlan said, "Walnut Creek," and got to his feet. "My knees are stiff."

Hightail Smith had a bottle. He passed the quart around. "Put a fire inside us that'll keep us warm." He got directly under the drop of water and it hit him in the forehead as he drank. "Damn it!"

"Your broncs," said the older Estaban. "We have them against the far wall, *senores*. They are waiting there, and we have already saddled them. We have put a little jerked beef in each saddlebag along with the bullets."

"Might be a false alarm," muttered Skinny.

Kid Harris was pulling on his slicker. "Might be, at that." He was walking out in the rain, following Garlan. They went to their horses, five men in the rain.

They took a length of time tightening *cinchas* to their proper tightness. Kid Harris fumbled with his latigo strap. Garlan took his stirrup and rose. Pedro's bronc was cold and mean and wanted to buck. The Mexican turned him hard by the bit and Garlan rode close, quirt falling. He beat the bronc and this took the fight out of him.

Pedro said, "*Gracias, senior.*"

They left the place on a lope. Garlan glanced back and saw the outlines of the Estabans against the puny fire.

and found his visalia.

Pedro moaned, "There the word is again.

Garlan turned and found the lead. They went down the ridge in the darkness, riding recklessly. They were riding against time and against distance. Garlan was tired, and he remembered what a saddle-bum had told him once. There had been a roundup camp in Nevada on the rim of the desert and the bum had come in for chuck, riding a tired old burro. And the men had started ribbing him good-naturedly.

"Why don't you ride a horse, 'stead of that old mule?"

"He's fast enough for me."

"You won't never get no place on that burro."

The bum had reached for another biscuit. "Cowboy, I'm in no hurry to get no place. You gents can ride fast hosses an' cut across great distances. Not me, fella. I'm no fool. Nobody'd won over time or distance yet, and man has tried to win ever since the first caveman run a log under a load, making a wheel out of the log."

Garlan was remembering that, and smiling.

They came down off another hill, riding through the brush. They rode by instinct and saddle-savvy. Their horses were tough, hill horses, raised to rocky slants and brush-covered terrain.

"Walnut Creek," said Garlan.

Here on the level they loped faster. Garlan saw the rise of horsemen ahead and called, "Bar S men coming in."

"This way," said don Alvarado.

The elderly man had six riders. Horses reared and fought their bits.

"You are late," said the *don*.

Garlan told them about Skinny and Hightail getting into camp late. They were already moving through the night. Saddle-leather creaked and hoofs hit rock and mud. The rain slanted in and beat their slickers.

Garlan asked, "Sean O'Henry?"

"He is my son-in law," the *don* said. He laughed but Garlan found no mirth in the sound.

CHAPTER XXI

MACK COLTON watched Sean O'Henry ride away from the Beer Bottle *hacienda*. Colton's eyes were a little too tight. He got a horse and followed the Irishman and watched him ride into the yard of the *Alvarado* rancho.

"No hasher for him to marry," he said. "He's after Zona Alavardo."

Colton had suspected this for some time. Unknown to O'Henry, he had seen the Irishman and Zona meet, back in the hills. Colton didn't give a damn then, But now this took on an added twist. O'Henry knew that Beer Bottle men were to raid Alvarado cattle tonight. What if he told Don Alvarado?

Colton rode back to the Beer Bottle. He called his riders and told them to saddle and get ready.

Martinez asked, "A daylight raid, Mack?"

Colton looked out into the swirling, mucky rain. "Call it daylight if you want to, Pinto. But a man can't see very far in this weather."

His men came up, already wet in leather. He glanced at them and reckoned their power; he was satisfied. He swung his arm and they rode out, hitting their bronses. They came across the flat and rode into the hills. Pinto Martinez rode close and asked, "Where's Sean?"

Colton waved an arm across space.

Martinez fell back, frowning. The gesture could have meant anything. He did not press the question any further. They came to Walnut Creek and the stream was roaring. They crossed it with their horses braced against the swiftness. On the other side, they came out of the muddy water, looking like overgrown beavers.

"Damn this rain," said Martinez.

Colton stood on his tiirrips. "Thank God for it, Pinto," he said. "It might cover you so a bullet can't find you."

Martinez rubbed his hand on his saddlehorn. He was riding a flat-horned, flat-forked Mexican saddle with a low cantle. He asked, "Is it getting that tight, Mack? Will it break soon?"

Colton had no answer.

When they reached the high foothills, the day had changed to darkness. They swung around *Caballo Mesa* and reached a canyon. They put their horses down this and it ran out, turning into a giant plain. At the end of this stood *Pinon Mesa*.

The wind was whistling in pines and the rain had changed to sleet here in the high altitudes. Behind rocks hung whisks of snow that was more sleet than crystals. The wind was cold and the riders were cold. Only the horses were warm, and they had traveled fast.

"Cattle ahead," said a rider.

Colton said, "Up with your reins, men," and they grouped around him. He looked at them again, weighing their toughness, and again he was satisfied. "Split up. Martinez, you take the south; I'll handle the north. Push them toward the desert. Run them hard for a ways to take the power out of them; then they'll settle down."

"Where's O'Henry?" asked a man.

Colton said flatly, "O'Henry's out of this. He's out, see? He's gone." He added, "Or he'd better be gone."

Martinez turned his horse. Three men rode with him. They fanned out wide and cattle came through the brush. They were wild and a man and rider would come out of the rain, and the cattle would run. They ran the way a deer runs: they had their horns back and their heads out, splitting the *chamiso* and *mesquite*.

COLTON REACHED a rocky point. He could see the herd forming below him; soon darkness would be in. He came down, his horse sliding, and Martinez rode out of the night, calling as he came.

"We have them, Mack."

"I'll take the lead. Drift them east, and fast. Send two flankers out and the rest of you push. All right."

Brush popped and cattle moved. Riders talked to the cattle and a bull-whip sounded, flat and mean and sharp. Colton took the lead and the steers were behind him. He ran at a lope, and behind him came the cattle. They went this way for three miles

or so, and the cattle lost their winds and slowed down. Colton swung around and let them go by and fell in beside Martinez.

"Not too fast, Pinto. That *Morto* man will need some beef on them, or it's no sale."

"They won't lose much; they're hard. Well, come daylight we'll be back home, and this will be over."

"Before daylight," said Colton.

He loped back and took the point. An hour passed, and the cattle were walking, not running. They reached a wide trail and they came to the desert. The sand was hard under the wash of the rain and the bumps of cacti and *occotillo* were dark in the darkness. And still the rain came in.

Colton was cold. A man had a bottle of *mescal*. He drank a little and handed the bottle back: "Of the two, I take the cold weather."

Now let Sean O'Henry tell Don Alvarado if he wanted! Now let the Alvarado men hit at *Pinon Mesa*. They would find no cattle there, nor would they find Beer Bottle riders. There would be but darkness and boulders and the wash of the endless rain.

Colton thought, "But Sean won't tell." The Irishman was square; he was no squealer. Maybe this precaution was unneeded. Anyway, the drive was almost over; the end was in sight. There would be other drives, for *Morto* needed beef.

Martinez came up and rode beside him. "They don't need me back there," he said. "They're enough now that the cattle have slowed down."

"We leave the desert soon," said Colton.

An hour later, they came off the flatness, and went into the hills. They were south and east of Jacumba, the town across the border. Colton put spurs to his horse and rode ahead. He was gone a few minutes, and then Martinez saw him coming out of the rain.

"Right ahead," he said.

The cattle came into a natural park. They were tired and they started to graze. Colton and Martinez rode to the small fire that flowed safely under the overhang of a sandstone boulder.

der. Mario stood there, scowling fiercely. Another man stood beside him, and four more loafed back in the darkness.

"How many head, Colton?" asked Mario.

Colton said, "Two hundred and six."

Mario looked at the man beside him. He gestured with his head and the man got on his horse and rode to the herd.

"My count's right," said Colton, almost angrily.

Mario murmured, "Morto's orders." He sighed with great ado. "Tecate went down today, and the big part of the men come along tomorrow to move against Tia Juana. We need more beef soon."

Colton thought.

"We need more beef, lots of beef," repeated Mario.

Colton said, "I heard you."

"Or horses?," asked Mario. "Those made good chewing." He was smiling with the fire showing his smile. "They didn't know the difference. They thought they were eating a cow."

"Not for two weeks," said Colton.

MARIO LOOKED at him steadily. Colton had the sudden idea that something was moving out in the rain; this was taking form and piling up, and there was danger in it.

Mario spoke. "You damn' fool? You think men do not need to eat for two weeks? We need beef, horses, anything—and in two days."

"This range is ready to break open," said Colton.

"We need meat."

Colton said, slowly. "All right, Mario. Where at?"

"The other side of Tecate."

"That means we drive across Bar S grass."

Mario shrugged. "Get horses, then. Take those to the north of Bar S grass. Put them across the hills. Two nights from now. Not tomorrow night, but the next?"

Colton nodded.

Mario's man rode back and said, "Count correct. Good stock, fat." He spoke to the men in the shadows and

they got to their feet and went to their horses. Mario handed Colton the buckskin bag and Colton heard the clink of coins.

"Gold again," said Mario.

Colton said, "Two nights from now, then?" and got on his horse. His men came back and one said, "Just midnight. That was a fast one," and he laughed.

Colton turned and they followed. Their tension was broken; they laughed and talked, and Colton grew morose, silent. He did not join in on this. Time was heavy across him, and he felt its great weight.

They reached the desert again. The rain died a little and stars showed indistinctly. Their horses were tired but they pushed them with their rowels. When they reached the western hills, the rain had died completely. Stars showed clear and there were few clouds. Those there were traveled in the high altitude wind that was breaking them apart.

Colton watched the wind break up the clouds into wisps of vapor that hung across the stars. Gradually the clouds disappeared and in time the stars held complete sway. The Milky Way was a band of silver points. He looked at it and remembered that he had once read that there were planets or stars in the Milky Way that would make the earth look like a pinhead. That there were suns there, endless across space and time, that would make the center of the world's universe seem small in comparison.

He let himself think of these facts. Were there people there, and were there cattle, and were there horses? Did men fight over grass? These thoughts were too big; too strong; man, he reasoned, should not think them. He should not think too much about something he could never hope to understand. And even if some power laid the motivation bare to him, the immensity of the scheme was too great for his brain.

"There'll be a moon toward morning," said Martinez.

Colton said, "We'll be home, first."

But he was wrong. The moon-rise caught them ten miles or so from the Beer Bottle *rancho*. The silver of it

lay across the brush and brought out objects clearly. The air had turned cold and it came through their slickers. That meant that the rain was done for some time, for it would not rain with such a chill in the atmosphere.

Martinez said, "Grass will grow green, now. Spanish daggers will shoot out on the desert along with yucca and painter's brushes."

"You're latin," said Colton. "You think of such things, even as you steal."

Martinez frowned. "It is the poet in me."

Colton said, "Poet, hell!" and they both laughed.

They were tired. The night and the ride had cut them to the bone with the dagger of weariness. Yet vigilance was with Colton. His eyes were on the ridges, on the high spots, and he missed nothing.

"There's that cougar," he said.

Martinez caught a glimpse of the big mountain lion running across a park in the *pinons*. He was dragging his rifle from saddle-boot but Colton pushed his arm down, holding it. He said, "None of you shoot, sabe?"

They watched the big cat run into the brush.

Martinez said, "I could have killed him."

Colton said, "Let him live." He had a quick remembrance: they were like the cougar; man's hand was against them. Only there was one difference. They had invoked the hand of their neighbors to rise against them by their acts; the cougar had been doomed to be hunted by his accident of birth.

They gained the last ridge. The Beer Bottle *hacienda* lay on the creek below. Buildings lay somber under the moon.

Colton said, "It'll be warm down there," and his horse braced himself as he went down the steep, slippery trail.

CHAPTER XXII

WHEN Don Alvarado and Ed Garlan and the riders reached *Pinon Mesa*, the rain was falling with a mad hardness.

It seemed to bear a grudge against itself and against man and beast and shrub. The wind whipped against their slickers and held the oilskins tight against them as the rain beat across the terrain.

They had built a plan of action. Each man would act for himself. They would branch out, finding hiding spots, and waylay the Beer Bottle men if and when they came for the herd. The whole plan was built on assumption that the herd would be raided. But when riders came back, plainly perplexed, Garlan knew something had gone wrong.

"They ain't no cattle here," said Skinny Marsh. "What I wouldn't do to be able to suck a cigaret!"

Don Alvarado rode in. "We can't find cattle," he said. "They were here, too, when I saw them."

Other riders reported the same. They gathered under the protection of a giant live-oak whose wide arms sheltered them from the rain. One man had found three cattle—and they were booger-wild.

"Looked to me like somebody'd hazed them lately. They were wild as a turpentine coyote."

"I saw two," said an Alvarado *vaquero*.

"They might have drifted," said the *don*.

The wind, they all agreed, might have driven them off the *mesa*, putting them to the east, what with the rain pounding against them. One thing seemed certain: the cattle would not drift into the face of the wind. They would drift with it. They split up again and rode east. The rise of the *mesa* behind them broke the wind a little. They rode for two hours, working the country. And when they met again, their talk was the same. A few cattle, wild as deer, and that was all.

Garlan suddenly caught the drift. "They've already hit," he said. "Colton probably saw O'Henry ride up to your *hacienda*, Don Alvarado. He might have suspected O'Henry would tell you about his raid, so he hit early."

The *don* nodded slowly. "That must be it."

There was no use looking for

tracks. The rain would see that was left. Garlan felt beaten, confused. They had keyed themselves up high; the heights were tumbling under them. And to a man, it left them angry with circumstance. *Don Alvarado* was swearing softly in Spanish.

"We go home?" asked Pedro Malone.

A horse stirred.

"The rain-is breaking," a man said.

Skinny Marsh spoke. "Wild goose chase. That Colton's smart. Stole the whole shebang right from under us." He laughed quietly.

"What we do?" asked Pedro.

Don Alvarado looked hard at Ed Garlan. "We could ride after them and maybe catch them?"

The wind came in again, angry in the bows of the oaks. This whipped in cold, then suddenly died.

"No use in following them, I guess." It was the *don* speaking again. "We could never locate them."

GARLAN TURNED his horse. He looked toward the west and lifted his eyes. "This storm is breaking. No, we could never follow them. We haven't even got any idea where they'd deliver the herd. We know for sure it's going to *Morto*, I guess. But we do know one thing—when the raid is over, they'll return home."

Men glanced at each other.

Skinny turned and said, "All right."

There was no need for haste now. They rode at a walk or a trot. When the going got tough, they pulled to a walk. The rain came again but there was less wind with it. Hightail said, "The ocean must be above us. It must be hanging up there in them clouds."

Kid Harris said, "What next, Hightail?"

Garlan was silent. They reached a flat and he watched the clouds run across the sky, pushed by a mad high wind. There was no wind on the earth now. The clouds were breaking against this force and the stars were coming clear. Five miles further, and a man said, "Here comes the moon."

"We got one help," said *Don Alvarado*.

They came down a slant, horses jogging. "Boundary creek ahead," said a man. They put horseflesh into it. Water splashed and wet them but they were so wet now they didn't care. The far bank showed ahead and their horses came to it and the water receded. They were but a few miles from the Beer Bottle *hacienda*.

Garlan said, "Hold up."

They held a council. *Don Alvarado* would stay back, a mile or so from the *hacienda*, and he would keep his men there. When and if the Beer Bottle men came, the *don* would send a runner ahead to warn the Bar S men. Then he could move in from behind and hold there.

A man said, "Maybe they're home in bed, for all we know."

"We'll find out," assured Skinny.

Garlan and his men rode ahead. They came into the *pinons* over the Beer Bottle and set boots to earth there. Garlan said, "Skinny and I will go down, see. You three, take spots. We'll look around good. If you hear any shooting, come down quick. On the run."

"They might be in bed," said Hightail. "Hell, they might not even be out raiding. Those cattle might have drifted."

Garlan said, "Skinny, get your rifle."

"If they're not home?" asked Pedro. "What then, boss?"

"We won't come back until it's over. We'll settle down there and use our rifles. I sit clear? If they are there, we come back; if they are not there, we stay."

Skinny said, "I got my rifle."

With Garlan leading, they went down the slope. Garlan followed a trail that ran back and forth, and behind him Skinny labored to keep footing in the mud. They went back and forth, following the trail, and they came to the flat. There were in the shadow of an outbuilding on the *rancho*.

"The bunkhouse," said Garlan.

Skinny murmured, "I'll stay outside."

Garlan went to the door and turned it and went quietly inside. A few

minutes passed and he came out. "Nobody there," he said.

"They're out, then. They're raiding."

They hunkered beside the building. The wind had died completely and the moon was bright. Skinny said, "I wish I could light a smoke."

"Chew it," said Garlan.

"Not me. I tried it once. It made me sick."

Garlan smiled at that.

A HORSE stomped in the barn. Garlan wondered where the dogs were. Probably sleeping somewhere and in out of the rain. Skinny shifted and raised his rifle a little, then settled back.

"Be easy," said Garlan.

Skinny became a dark, heavy ball. Garlan felt the chill creep into him. Still, he was silent. He thought of Don Alvarado and his men out there. He thought of Zona and O'Henry—they would be on the boat now, and the moonlight would be on the whitecaps. They were out of this forever.

"That damn' cricket," said Skinny.

Garlan became aware of the cricket's song. He was somewhere under a log, he supposed. They settled there and chirped. The song was sharp and without tune and rubbed on his nerves, too.

"You're touchy, Skinny."

More time went by. Garlan tried to keep from thinking. Dawn was but a few minutes away, less than an hour.

"Wish I was home in my sougans," murmured Skinny.

Garlan had no answer.

Skinny turned his rifle. "Man coming."

Garlan looked at the man hard. Then he called, "This way, *mucha-cho*."

The man was an Alvarado rider. He was panting, half from his run, half from excitement. "They come. Don Alvarado sent me. He comes behind them."

"Colton there?"

"Si. He rides ahead, with Peento Marteez."

"Go back," said Garlan. "You've told my men on the ridge?"

"Si."

The shadows came out and jerked

the Mexican into them. Skinny got to his feet and grunted. "Got a leg muscle pain," he said. He closed his eyes and gritted his teeth and finally opened them. "Had them ever since I was a kid."

Garlan said, "Riders are coming."

Across the hoof-packed yard, two men rode in. They would have to pass the bunkhouse to get to the barn. Garlan heard the high whine of the cricket as he moved ahead. Skinny Marsh pulled off to one side, standing there in darkness. The riders came closer and were twenty feet away.

Garlan said clearly, "All right, Colton. Step down."

Colton and Martinez jerked in their reins. Skinny Marsh came out, rifle up. "We missed you out there on *Pinon Mesa*. We figured we'd come in and get you here at home."

Colton said, "For what?"

The sound of guns firing came from behind them. Martinez turned and looked back, and Garlan saw his eyes were wide.

"That's Don Alvarado and his men," said Garlan. "They're fighting your men, back there. You've played your string out, Colton."

"You have nothing on us." Colton spoke evenly.

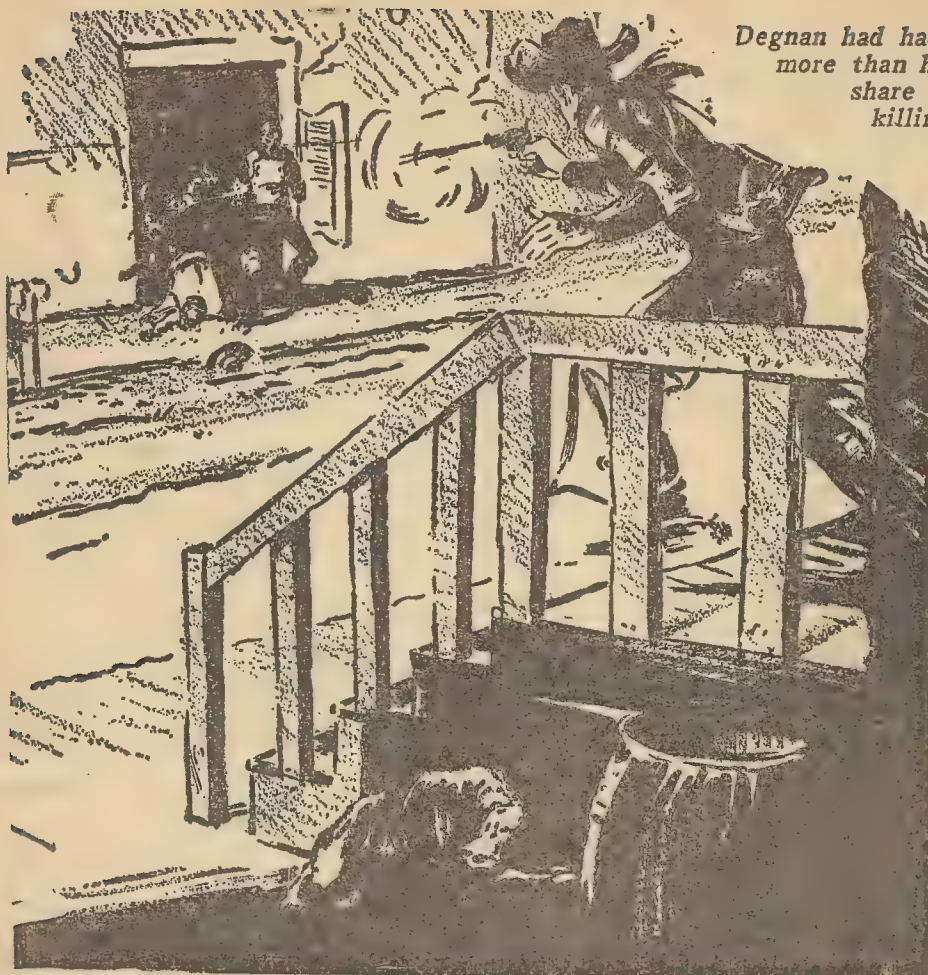
The gunfire died for a moment and Garlan noticed that it had silenced the cricket. "Both of us have had enough of you, Colton. We're taking the law into our own hands. We'll hang you and your men."

"It's been done before," said Skinny Marsh.

Martinez said huskily, "You aren't hanging me—" and his gun was turning. Garlan glimpsed Skinny's rifle ball knocking Martinez from leather. The Mexican was falling over the horn and his bronc was rearing.

OTHER RIFLES were talking, too. Garlan brought his rifle around and shot, but Colton had left his horse. He was beyond the animal, shooting under him, and Garlan took his sights down. Colton's horse ran off, reins pulling in the mud.

(Continued On Page 112)



Degnan had had
more than his
share of
killing

THE BULLET GAMBLER

"You ain't got the law to back every move you make now, Degnan. And I have five hundred bucks which says that if you'll meet me in a face-to-face shoot-out, I'll come back while you stay there. Dare to take me?"

By ABEL SHOTT

LEAVING his pony at the hitch-rail, Powder Degnan headed for the doorway of Pine Hill's *Lucky Lode* barroom, stumbled over the first of the low steps to the entrance. He smiled crookedly. The next moment his big whalebone frame galvanized as a man called his name from along the wooden sidewalk to his right.

"Howdy, Degnan. Ain't seen you since back in Cemetery Flats a coupla years ago," the man sang out.

Husky wide-shouldered Degnan grinned vaguely, waved to the gent. "That's right, I reckon. You're looking good. Hope things are all right with the family, too." He went on into the big barroom. Behind him, the man on the sidewalk looked puz-

zled. He had no family, had never been married.

Inside, Powder Degnan paused a moment, hand hooked in the brass-studded belt over one of his holsters. Then he relaxed, remembering he was no longer riding the Law trail. For so many years, he had been. Been a deputy for a spell. Been sheriff up in Shotgun County for two terms. After that, he had been a special State officer, appointed by the governor. In between times he had hired out to clean up bad towns and lobo roosts. And there were stories that on occasion, he had actually worked for nothing to bring law and order to gunman-infested hellholes. Law and justice had become the main aims in his life. He didn't like hunting down other men, had never killed unless forced to by the direst necessity. But the son of a father who'd gone bad, hit the owlhoot and wrecked his whole family life, Powder Degnan could never forget the evil and pain that outlawry bred.

"Howdy, Mr. Degnan," said a gambler in a stovepipe hat respectfully from a nearby table. The famed man-hunter was easily recognizable with that shock of coal-black hair and the old knife scar on his forehead.

Degnan nodded and headed over for the bar with a sigh of relief. For so many years, when he rode, when he sloped into a pueblo; it was on the trail of a man. Now all that was done with. He had hung up his guns. Men might talk, but it would be of the time when he had been one of the greatest trigger slammers to wear a badge, with the accent on the past tense. Soon he'd be settled down on that little outfit he'd purchased at the foot of the Mogollones. Somebody greeted him familiarly as "Powder" from another table further down the room. He waved though unable to recognize the gent, unable to recall his features.

At the bar, he ordered a drink, was just lifting it to his face, when the stout moon-faced proprietor stepped up beside him with a sort of furtive air.

"Right pleased to have your business, Mr. Degnan," he said hurriedly.

sotto voice. "But I reckon I better warn you. Joe Harley's in the place. Don't know how you missed him when you came in."

THEN IT HAPPENED. A chair scraped back sharply in a rear corner of the place. A hush fell. Then the man's bootheels smacked loudly through it. And stocky bull-like Harley with that big creamy-hued sombrero he always affected came striding barward with his rolling gait. Harley was said to have spent some time at sea before he came West.

Watching him from lid eyes in the bar mirror, Powder Degnan lifted the rest of his drink to his mouth. But his left hand was down close to his hip holster with its pearl-handled gun. He and Harley—known as "Bloody Joe" down in the Panhandle—were old foes. Harley had been an outlaw, heading his own bunch on the owlhoot. He was snaky fast with a hogleg. And, worse, he had a reputation for putting lead in a man on the slightest provocation. Twice Powder Degnan had smoked it out with some of the old-Harley Bunch. And about two years back, he had dragged Ed Harley, the outlaw's cousin, wanted for a killing, from a Bordertown hole on the Rio. Ed had died of the wounds received when he'd tried to resist arrest. And Joe Harley had spread the word that Degnan had killed his cousin after the latter had surrendered.

Joe Harley had been captured, convicted, and sent to the Big House. A few months ago, by some political wire-twisting, he had miraculously been pardoned. Now he roved the country, a free man with all charges against him wiped out. Now, though, there was blood in his eye as he neared the bar. His ledge of lower beard-stubbed jaw was shoved out ominously. He was on the prod for trouble. One of his big hands, a-quiver with the hatred seething inside him, edged toward a thonged-down gun.

"Howdy, Harley," Powder Degnan said calmly yet suddenly, without turning. "Hear you're riding straight now. Have a drink?"

Joe Harley was taken aback by the

ex-lawman's matter-of-factness. He himself was primed to curse and browbeat. His red-edged eyes squinted. "I'm right particular who I hoist a glass with, badge packer!" he snorted.

Degnan turned for the first time then, arms folded on his chest as if he had nothing to fear. "Then go to hell, Harley," he said quietly. "I ain't packing a tin badge no more. . . . But don't prod me—ever. The badge didn't help me pull the triggers, you know." Degnan signed the nervous drink wrangler to set them up for him and the proprietor.

"Here—I'll buy a drink on the house for ever'body," the latter said shakily. "Let's not have any trouble. Everybody's my friend. Come on."

Joe Harley spat on the spur-scraped floor. "Degnan, you and me's got an old score to settle. You gunned down my—"

"You were either misinformed, Harley," Degnan cut him off, "or are a damned liar! And take your choice. . . . Your cousin, Ed, was mortally wounded resisting arrest."

Anything might have happened then. Harley's big head had shot out and his thick shoulders jerked up at being called a liar. And then Reeder, the town marshal, stepped in the side door, a Colts dangling from his hand by the trigger guard. He was scared but nervy.

"Hope nobody wasn't thinking of starting a gun ruckus in here," he said, "She's a peaceful afternoon. I aim it should stay that way. . . ."

NOBODY answered that for some moments. Then Harley grinned evilly. "I ain't drawn a gun. And I don't reckon you got any charges against me, have you?" he asked Reeder. Then, to Powder Degnan: "Sure looks danged funny to see Mr. Powder Degnan hiding behind another man! Ha! And you badge packers sure stand together, don't you? Two of you against me! Ha-ha! Why—"

"I'm hiding behind no one," Degnan snapped, the hint of raw steel rising in his voice for the first time.

"Two of you!" said Harley again. He spat on the floor. "You alone, I could handle, Degnan!"

"Hit the trail, Harley! I've quit the Law business."

"Ain't that nice, now? For years, you ran around with posesses to back you up, a-hiding behind a tin badge, hunting down gents who never had a chance! The odds were always on your side! You had a right to kill them. But if one of them poor devils shot one of your breed, they were hunted plumb to Hell! That was a great game, Degnan. . . . And if you had the nerve to meet me man to man, hands filled—"

"Easy, Harley!" Degnan said, voice now knife-sharp.

"There ain't going to be no blood-letting in here," the town marshal said hurriedly.

"Not here!" Harley, working himself into a murderous rage, ground a heel noisily into the floor. "Outside. In the road. Face to face. Me coming from the other end, Degnan. A fair square gun duel." He nodded his head toward the half-leaf doors up front, toward the westering sun not far above the ragged line of hills beyond the town. "I'd be coming up the road when the sun touched that notch out yonder there." He expectorated with a savage grimace again. "I would, Degnan—if I thought you packed the nerve to meet me that way!"

"I'm tired of lead-swapping, tired of blasting men. But—"

Half choking, face black with the blood of hatred, Harley shouted him down. "You mean lily-livered, Degnan! You murdered my cousin! And I'd like to spit in your dying face to square the score. But, by gawd, you're scared! You know I'd kill you. Degnan, you yella polecat!" He grabbed out a fistful of greenbacks from a pocket. "I'd bet a hundred dollars I could kill you!"

The words seemed to hang on the stillness of the big barroom. A couple of men were peering in cautiously over the barwing doors.

Then Powder Degnan slowly reached inside his rusty black coat and produced a wallet. "You're being called, Harley. . . when the sun hits the notch." Calmly, unhurriedly, he began to count bills onto the bar.

Harley let go a peal of half-mad laughter. He slammed his bills on the

Lights Out for Big-Nose

A FACT STORY

By HARRY VAN DEMARK

A PICTURESQUE scoundrel he was among the outlaws of the Western frontier. "Big Nose" George, they called him and he first came into prominence when he held up the much-robbed Deadwood stage line in South Dakota. Invariably he escaped the posses that took his trail, and later, when Boon May and his warriors were hired to guard the stage, Big Nose migrated to Miles City, Montana.

In 1878 he threw in his lot with another George—George Chinnick—as vicious a rogue as ever went unhung. Chinnick ran a saloon and dance hall in Miles City, a hangout for toughs and gunmen. Chinnick himself spent most of his time at his ranch on Tongue River.

There, at Chinnick's invitation, Big Nose also made his home.

There were no philanthropic motives behind this move. It was a cold-blooded business proposition with Chinnick. Big Nose was a man of iron nerve, a handy chap to have around in a pinch.

Chinnick operated his own underground, had some means of learning when the stages carried treasure. This information he passed along to his outlaw friend. Between them they overlooked no bets.

Big Nose George always worked alone. He wanted no incumbrances. In fact, he boasted openly that there would never be a partner to squeal on him.

In one hold-up he robbed a Jewish clothing merchant named Connie, who was starting east well heeled with money to buy goods for his store. Connie recognized Big Nose later, tried to get the officers to arrest him. But such was Chinnick's power in and around Miles City that not one minion of the law would make a move.

But a nemesis was on Big Nose's trail. Quite unknown to him retribution was closing in.

Fred Smolski, a former scout under General Nelson A. Miles, was an occasional visitor to the Chinnick Ranch. He observed the comings and goings of Big Nose, but kept his own counsel. He knew, however, that the State of Wyoming had offered a large reward for the bandit.

Smolski saw no chance to connect Chinnick with Big Nose's operations, though he suspected the ranchman was the outlaw's backer and chief inspiration. When the ex-scout left the ranch it was in apparent friendliness.

But from that moment he was on the trail of Big Nose George. Secretly deftly he planned his campaign. He finally trailed his man to the Chinnick Ranch one day when Chinnick was in Miles City. He watched through a window until he saw the outlaw unbuckle his belt and guns and toss them on the lounge. Then he burst into the house with the command:

"I've got you, Big Nose! Put 'em up or die!"

Big Nose cursed roundly, but his hands went into the air!

Smolski tossed a pair of hand-cuffs in front of Mrs. Chinnick, who entered the room to see what had caused the commotion.

"Put 'em on him!" he ordered.

The woman protested, but finally as Smolski became insistent, she obeyed.

"Come on, now—get your horse. We're heading out of here," the ex-scout told his captive.

Smolski took Big Nose to Fort Keogh and locked him in the guard-house—this by prearrangement with General Miles. The ex-scout also planned to stay at the fort himself until the excitement blew over. He had no desire to return to Miles City and witness Chinnick's rage when he learned what had happened.

In the meantime, Chinnick went home, found that his pal had been cap-

tured. He raved like a wild man, swore he'd have Smolski's life.

He hurried to the Miles City jail, expecting to find his protegee there and effect his release. When he heard that Big Nose was reposing safely behind the stockades of Fort Keogh his rage increased.

While in this mood he returned to the ranch. There he sought to vent his anger upon his wife, insisting that she could have saved Big Nose from

capture. In this argument Chinnick came off second best. When he attempted violence upon Mrs. Chinnick, she shot him—and did a good job of it. He died before help could reach him.

Soldiers took Big Nose George to Butte, Montana and later to Cheyenne, Wyoming, where he was tried, convicted and hanged.

THE END

THE BULLET GAMBLER

(Continued From Page 87)

galloping hoofs. Looking up the broad alley, they saw Joe Harley bolt from a stand of trees back there on a pony he'd had waiting. He went high-tailing it up the hill and into the scrub brush beyond the town, quitting. Reeder told Degnan it was Harley, fleeing. Men came hustling up, scarcely able to believe it was over and not a drop of blood had been shed.

"Thank Gawd," said the marshal reverently. "But, Degnan, how'd you come to blast away at Old Stan there?"

Degnan pulled off his sombrero and rubbed the big beads of sweat from his face. He was deathly pale with a foolish grin, looking like a man who's been on the threshold of death. "My eyes," he said quietly. "They've been fading in the last few months. That's why I quit riding for the Law."

"What?" cried the marshal.

Degnan nodded. "Yep." "I thought that Stan must be Harley. You see, even when we began shooting, he was little more than a blur to me."

"Good Gawd!" breathed the boss of the Lucky Lode, remembering how the man had stumbled over that cuspidor. "You was crazy to take a chance goin' up against him then! And you betting that three thousand like a wild man on yourself! Holy Gawd!"

Powder Degnan nodded, laughing a little then. "That's how I whipped Harley, betting on myself that heavy. Sure. I outbluffed him! His nerve began to run out when he heard I was betting like that. He was so scared he missed, then turned tail. That bet was better than my bullets....And now, gents, the drinks are on me.."

THE END

JUDGE BATES Is Back!



WATCH FOR A NEW BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL OF
THE SALTY JURIST AND HIS POSTMASTER SIDE-
KICK, TOBACCO JONES

In The Next Issue Of

Gunsmoke Holiday

By LEE FLOREN

**Blue Ribbon
WESTERN**



NEVER GIVE A SNAKE THE FIRST BITE

By **ALLAN K. ECHOLS**

*...and don't try to get down
on your belly to fight him,
either!*

AS GALE FORD rode out of the cut and up towards Elmo Rankin's shabby ranch, he felt inside him somewhere the coals of a deep-seated anger rising to a steady flame.

A warning voice, sounding like Jenny's, kept whispering in his ear:

"Don't let your temper get the better of you, Gale. You're too willing to fight."

The warning beat against his anger, but could not stay its swelling.

He rode on past Rankin's sway-backed hay barn and on down toward the fifteen acre feed lot where a bunch of vari-colored scrub cattle nursed double that number of new scrub calves. He dismounted at the feed lot gate as two men left off pitching hay from a wagon and came out the gate to meet him.

"Howdy, Ford." The elder Rankin was a head taller than Gale, and lean and hard as an oak sapling. His face was gray with dirt accumulated in the pores of his wrinkled skin, and the upper edge of his undershirt, showing at his neck was gray with grime. There was no cordiality in his greeting.

His son, a replica of the old man as he must have looked thirty years ago, took a chew of tobacco and stood with his fists in his overalls pockets, mean eyes alert.

"Rankin," Gale said coldly. "Looks like your stuff has all throwed twins this year. Kinda unusual breed o' cattle you got, ain't it? Must be some sheep blood in 'em."

The old man rubbed his gray nose. "What're you tryin' to say, Ford?" he asked coldly. "See any o' yore calves in the lot?"

"No, I don't. But my calves are disappearing as fast as they're born. And a lot of your stuff out on the open range are nursing full blooded Black Angus calves. I came to ask you what you knew about that?"

"I don't know nothin' about that," Rankin replied angrily, "But I do know you're hinting that I'm stealin' yore calves, and—"

"I'm not hinting it; I'm saying it. And I know how you're doing it—"

Gale did not get to finish his accusation. Young Jude Rankin dived for him with fists pistoning out like pine knots, and a blow to his jaw jolted him to his boot heels. Gale staggered, righting himself, buried his chin in his collar and went after Jude.

He rained wild blows on the son, and rawhide muscle was behind them.

But Jude Rankin was a dirty fighter and tough as a fence post. He came in with fists flying, and the blows landed. They hurt. His fist with a horseshoe-nail ring on one finger, grazed Gale's cheek and laid it open from his nose to the outer corner of his eye.

Gale took a step backward, dodged a dozen flying fists, then got in one to the point of Rankin's chin, which sent Rankin to the ground. Rankin blindly wrapped his two arms around Gale's legs, brought them together with a bear hug, and jerked Gale down on top of him.

Then Jude Rankin yelled: "Get him, Pop."

The older man joined the fray—using his boots for weapons. As the son and Gale rolled in the dirt, the elder Rankin hovered over them, kicking at Gale's head at every opportunity.

The blows stunned him. His head was swimming, and he could not see. But he knew that Jude Rankin had disentangled himself and rolled away. And then the elder Rankin jumped on him and with booted feet was stamping him into unconsciousness. Jude scrambled to his feet, and now they were both kicking him. Then a boot-toe against his head knocked him into oblivion.

AS HE REGAINED consciousness, he found himself lying in the road outside of Rankin's gate. His hat had been thrown out with him, and his horse stood with reins dragging along the gully, grazing. His head and body were a mass of aches and pains. He put his hand to his face and it came away sticky with blood. One eye was closed, and the ring cut was swollen and raw.

The strength had been sapped from him, and it took him a long while to get up and mount his horse. He looked around, did not see the Rankins, and debated whether to go in and look for them, or to ride on. Then more of Jenny's words came back to him.

"You're got a responsible job now, Gale, and you're got to remember your responsibilities. You can't just keep on being a happy-go-lucky boy

that will fight for the love of a battle. Your future depends on you acting like a grown person ought to act."

He didn't like the idea of riding away from the place where he'd taken a whipping, but he knew that Jenny was right. He probably shouldn't have gone about the matter this way, but that wild, fighting streak had taken charge of him, that old conviction that he was big enough to handle his own affairs without help and in his own way.

Well, he'd tried it, and he'd taken an awful beating. It wouldn't be nice to face Jenny, looking like he did. But it had to be done. He turned his horse's head toward home, and it was the first time in his life that he'd ever left a fight he hadn't won.

At home he drove his horse on into his barn, fed and watered him, and threw down some feed, taking more time than he needed, looking for little odd jobs to do before going to the house where Jenny should have dinner cooked by now.

And then he could put it off no longer. He went up to the bench back of the house and washed his face and went in.

Jenny was pretty in her short house dress, and her face was pink from the heat of the cookstove. She looked up at him gravely, holding a pan of hot biscuits with a rag. Her voice had a kind of sinking tone.

"What happened, Gale?"

She set the biscuits down and came and touched his swollen eye.

"What happened?"

Gale's voice was defensive. "Rankin's stealing my calf crop. I went over to talk to him about it. Jude jumped me, and the pair of them gave me an awful whipping. Dinner ready?"

SHE BROUGHT some fried steak off the stove, her mouth a tiny tight line. She did not say any more until she had poured the coffee and they had started to eat. She was lost in thought.

She framed her words carefully, for she knew how Gale felt. "If you knew he was stealing the calves,

wouldn't it have been better to have taken the evidence to the sheriff and let him handle it?"

"What good would that do me? Rankin didn't have the calves on his place. My calves are out on the range, nursing his scrub cows. He's got his own scrub calves doubled up with the she stuff he's got in his feed lot. That way, there's just not any legal evidence to prove that he stole my stuff."

"Then maybe he didn't steal them. A calf will nurse any mother cow that will let him. You've got no proof that the calves nursing his mothers are yours, or if you had, you still don't have proof that he deliberately started your calves following his cows."

"I don't need any more proof. I know a pure bred Black Angus calf when I see it, and those are my calves. It didn't just happen that the cows in his feed lot had twins, and that my calves are nursing his range cows. He switched 'em."

"Maybe so," Jenny answered patiently. "But don't you see, fighting doesn't prove anything. You've got to have proof for the court—"

"Look, honey," Gale argued. "You've just got too much faith in people. You believe that everything will come out all right in the long run if you just sit back and wait. But I can't do that. The bank put me here to run this ranch, and I owe it to them to protect their stock. A cattle thief ain't going to get an audience to watch him steal, and the bank is going to hold me responsible for those calves. If I can't produce an eyewitness to that stealing, then I've got to stop it some other way. It's my job to stop it, and that I'm going to do if I've got to take a beating from those coyotes every day till I catch 'em."

He got out of the kitchen before Jenny could answer. He knew what her argument would be, and he didn't want to hear it. He went out and got his fencing tools and spent the afternoon repairing fence around the pastures that were beginning to show green with spring grass. At dusk he came in and did his chores and had

supper, still worried about his calves.

The bank had given him a year to make good, and so confident of his ability had he been, that on the strength of it he and Jenny had married. He would not have felt it right to have asked her to marry him yet, if he hadn't got this opportunity to build a home for her. Now he dreaded the thought of failure, which would leave him a fifty-dollar a month puncher again. It would not be fair to her.

AFTER SUPPER a horseman rode up. Sheriff Windom dismounted and came in. Gale invited him into the house, and, his sense of trouble rising slowly, waited for him to state his business.

"Gale," Windom said, when he was comfortably seated and had his pipe going. "Seems like Rankin is a little sore at you for licking him and his son. He's put a assault and battery charge against you. Judge Corfee gave me a warrant to serve on you, to be in Justice Court at nine in the morning to answer the charge. You'll be there?" He laid the paper on the table beside him.

"He's charging me with whipping him and Jude?" Gale asked in surprise. "Hell, they jumped me and then kicked the stuffing out of me. Does my face look like I won that fight?"

"Not exactly," Window grinned. "But you did go over and start the trouble, didn't you?"

"Sure. I went over and accused them of stealing my calves, but that was just stating a fact."

"You shouldn't have done that."

"What would you have done if you knew they was stealing your stuff?"

"I wouldn't have fought them. I'd have presented my evidence to the court and got a warrant out for them."

"You're just like my wife. Listen here, Sheriff, you know cattle. Here's what that hombre did—"

"Hold your horses," Windom interrupted. "My job's just to serve that paper. I ain't the judge. The question is, will you promise to be in court in the morning?"

Jenny said quickly, "We'll be

there, Mr. Windom. I'll promise."

Windom smiled. "That's good enough for me, Jenny. Now, Gale, I'm an old man. I wonder if you'll let me give you a little bit of advice."

"Sure. Looks like I need some—of the right kind."

"Well, here it is, right or wrong. The bank has tried half a dozen men running this place, and every one of them has lost stock. They all thought those Rankins got it, but nobody's been able to prove it."

"I'm going to, or take it out of their hides," Gale said.

"They all thought that. Those Rankins are a ornery, dirty tribe, that don't look like they've got sense enough to pour sand out of a boot with the directions written on the heel. But don't let their looks fool you. That old buzzard has got a sharp, scheming mind, and he's been mad at the bank for years. He just lives for the purpose of sucking their blood on account of them foreclosing on him once. He's smart, and he's playing for keeps."

GALE THOUGHT a minute. "I reckon I kinda underestimated him. They proved already how vicious they was when the two of them got me down and stomped me."

"And," the sheriff interrupted, "they're proving how smart they are by taking you to court. In spite of the law's intention that a man ain't guilty till he's proved so, it's humans that dispense the law, and it's nature to figure that where there's smoke there's bound to be fire. The fact that you came over there and started the trouble will support his charge that you beat him up. You just haven't got any witnesses to prove that it was the other way around. My advice is, don't underestimate Elmo Rankin. You shoulda got a fool-proof, iron-clad case against him before he ever knew you suspected him. You made the mistake of giving a snake the first bite."

"Maybe so," Gale admitted. "But that don't mean he's going to get the last one."

"That depends on you," the sheriff said. "You've got a better opportunity

here than most young fellows. You know cattle, and you're a worker, and the bank gave you a mighty good proposition when they gave you the chance to run this ranch on the shares, and to buy it out of your earnings if you make good. You've got a good wife and a good home. You're young, and you've got too much confidence in yourself. Don't make the mistake of getting down on your belly and fighting with a snake on his terms."

GALE AND JENNY went to town in the wagon in the morning, and Gale was silent and worried. This business of having responsibilities was a different thing from just riding hell-for-leather from payday to payday. It was mighty fine, having a ranch to run, and a wife, but it kinda put a damper on a man's inclination.

Judge Corfee was a chipper little old man with a white goatee that jerked nervously, and a pair of iron rimmed glasses that continuously slid down in the bridge of his nose. He took himself very seriously, and when he rapped for order he looked sternly over his glasses until the room was quiet.

The Justice Court was upstairs over the saddlery, and it was already half filled with curious idlers who watched as Gale followed Jenny in and sat down opposite Elmo Rankin and his two sons. Ben Rankin, who had missed the fight, glared at Gale, who sat down without looking at him. The idlers compared the beaten faces of the fighters, deciding from the wounds what the fight must have been like.

Judge Corfee opened the case, heard both sides, interrupting frequently.

Elmo Rankin and Jude had framed a simple story, and they stuck to it, lying easily and convincingly. By using some of the truth as a springboard, they made the lie sound more convincing, for Gale admitted that he had gone to their place and accused Elmo of stealing his calves.

"Then," Elmo lied, "when I denied it, he started beating me up. He'd a

killed me, I reckon, if my son Jude hadn't come out of the barn and hope me. Like it was, he knocked us both down and rid off leavin' us lyin' there unconscious."

Judge Corfee closed the case abruptly.

"It seems to the court," he squeaked, "that you, Ford, did not have positive evidence that Rankin stole your calves. But, nonetheless, you admit you took the law into your hands and went over and gave the plaintiff a shellacking without due cause. What you should have done, if you had evidence to convict, was to lay it before—"

"They're both liars," Gale interrupted. "But I'm saying—"

The judge pounded his table with his fist. "You're out of order. I was speaking. Don't interrupt the court again. You should have laid your evidence before the court. But you did not have sufficient evidence to justify any action. I therefore find you guilty of assault and battery. But considering that you're a hard working young man, even if you're too hot headed for your own good, I'm going to remit the jail sentence and fine you twenty dollars. Case dismissed."

The idlers waited around for the next case, while Gale went up to the clerk and paid his fine. His blood was boiling with the injustice of the trial. He and Jenny started out, and were by the rear door when Ben Rankin sidled up to him.

"You shore was smart to do yore fightin' when I wasn't around to side the old man and Jude," he said. "If that judge ain't taught you your lesson, then come over to our place again when I'm around—"

"What's the matter with right here?" Gale answered, and swung a blow at the man's chin.

Ben Rankin was no slouch at rough and tumble fighting. In two seconds fists were flying, and in a few more seconds, Gale and Ben were rolling on the floor of the courtroom, exchanging blows, clawing faces and choking.

The courtroom became a madhouse. Ben Rankin got Gale's ear in his mouth and bit down hard. Gale got

his fingers laced in the man's tangled hair and beat his head against the floor like a cook cracking an egg, until Rankin passed out cold.

THE SHERIFF and two volunteers finally got Gale off of the man, while the judge danced around the floor like a wood pecker on a hollow tree, shouting for order in the court.

"That'll cost you another twenty," he shouted, sticking his finger under Gale's nose. "And the next time, it'll be a year in jail. I never seen such disrespect to the court."

"Don't argue with him," Jenny pleaded.

Gale paid his fine and got down the steps and out onto the street. He headed for the bank, where he found Rex Mallard, the president, and told him the whole affair. Finally he had found a man who would listen to what he had to say.

"This is Rankin's scheme, so far as I could figure," he explained. "As soon as our calves are born, or soon after, he slips out there on the Government range and takes one of his own new calves away from one of his range cows, and throws it in with the stuff he's got in his feed lot to nurse. Then he takes one of our calves and starts it nursing the scrub mother whose calf he took. Naturally the calf follows this new mother, and when roundup time comes, the calf will be recorded as his, because it's following a cow with his brand on it. That's the rule. And in the meantime, he hasn't got any of our calves in his own feed lot, and nobody saw him switch those calves, so nobody can present positive proof that he is stealing our stuff."

"So that's how he works it!" Mallard mused. "But how can we prove it?"

"I don't reckon we can get what they call court evidence unless we catch him with one of our calves in his hands. But I know what he's doing. Any cattleman would know it, though he couldn't prove it in court.

"We've got Angus sires and dams, and they're kept up on our own range till Fall, when they've turned out on

Government open range for the winter. Rankin has got scrub stuff, including a scrub black bull, and he does the same.

"Now he hasn't got any Angus sires or dams, and none of our stuff was on the range at a time to have any calves born to his stuff from our sires. He just simply couldn't have any Angus calves of his own. Any black calves nursing his cows would be scrubs."

"But that doesn't prove that any full-bloods he's got were stolen from us," Mallard speculated. "Knowing it is one thing. Proving it is another."

"That's where we're stumped. We've got good blocky stuff, and our calves would naturally reflect this blocky shape. When you've got blocky parents you get blocky calves, and that's just what's nursing his scrub mammals out there. A man knows what his calves will look like before they're born, but how can he prove it in court?"

"I see your point," Mallard admitted thoughtfully. "And I don't doubt that you're right. But there's another side we're going to have to figure. The bank is a public business that has to keep the good-will of the public. You're working for the bank. If we back you when you go gunning for a man that you can't convict in court, we lose friends, and if we don't back you up, we lose friends. That's why you've got to handle this thing different from the way you might if it was a private matter of your own."

"I see," Gale said, a rueful grin on his face. "I get fined when Rankin stomps the stuffing out of me. I get fined again when his son starts a fight with me. They're stealing the stuff you're paying me to look after, but the law protects them and fines me. I'm beginning to see that I sure enough did make a mistake when I let that snake take the first bite at me. I should have pulled his fangs first, then talked to him."

"No. That might be all right for a man with only himself to think of. But now you've got responsibilities to others, to the bank, and to your new wife. Actually, a responsible man has to let the snake take the first bite.

That's because it's got to be demonstrated to everybody that it's *him* and not *you*, that is the snake. A man, to have the confidence of his neighbors, has to be able to back up any charge he makes with unquestionable proof, otherwise, he leaves room for doubt about what he says."

Gale had to laugh. "Now I know just where I stand. The sheriff tells me never to let a snake get the first bite. You tell me to be sure and let him get the first bite."

"Rankin's a mighty smooth snake," Mallard said. "He's been preying on us for years, and nobody we've had out there yet has been able to stop him. It's up to you to catch him—but in a way in which the bank can back you up. That's your job, and you can do it, if you'll tackle it right. Good luck, Gale."

OUT ON THE street, Jenny went to do their shopping, while Gale walked down to the saloon for a beer. He was puzzled and hurt, and now he was thinking that the blessings of being a married man and a ranch operator had their drawbacks.

He was a young man who had lived a simple and uncomplicated life. He had worked hard and played hard and fought hard, and that was the end of the matter. Do your work, draw your pay, if a man did you wrong go to him and fight it out. You might not be getting anywhere in the world, but you always knew where you stood.

He stood in front of the slot machine, feeding quarters into it as he drank his beer and tried to figure things out. Maybe he'd take Jenny and go and homestead somewhere out in the newer country, where the matter of thievery was settled in a more direct fashion. Out where men with lawbooks didn't step in to confuse the simple issue of whether a man had been seen stealing your cattle or not.

In a place like that, things wouldn't be so complicated. A man could settle his troubles and keep his self-respect without finding himself mixed up with a lot of considerations like what the bank's customers would

think about you stopping a man from stealing your cattle.

The slot machine poured out a handful of aluminum tokens as he hit the jackpot, and he shoved them into his pocket without even realizing what had happened. He finished his beer, went out and found Jenny and they rode on home in the wagon, talking little.

"Gale," Jenny said when they were nearing the barn, "What are we going to do? Mr. Mallard doesn't want you to keep on fighting Rankin, but if Rankin keeps on stealing from us, we won't get to keep the ranch another year."

"I don't know, honey," he answered. "I honestly don't. I reckon I'm better as a hand than as a manager. It don't take so much thinking."

"But we've got to think."

"I know it, Jenny. Maybe it's just that I'm not used to using my brain, and it's kinda rusty. But there's one thing for sure—I don't know how I'm going to do it, but I'm going to pull Rankin's fangs if it's the last thing I ever do."

They drove into the barn and Jenny started to the house with the groceries while he unhitched the team.

"Bring in the eggs when you come," she asked over her shoulder.

Gale fed his horse, then went to the leanto to gather the eggs. As he opened the door, he halted in his tracks.

A big black snake was stuck in a rat hole leading under the barn floor. The snake had got partway through the hole, but an enlargement of his body in the middle had made it impossible for him to escape through the hole.

Gale looked at the snake, puzzled for a moment, then his face broke into a smile. He knew that these otherwise harmless snakes stole eggs, swallowing them whole, and that they crushed the shells with their stomach muscles.

"So, my friend," Gale said, picking up a stick. "You made a mistake and swallowed the china nest egg, huh? A little more than you can digest.

(Continued On Page 98)

HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF MEN



Appear

SLIMMER..

FEEL BETTER, LOOK YOUNGER

with **COMMANDER**

The Amazing New Abdominal Supporter

Yes, instantly, you, too, can begin to feel ALIVE... ON TOP OF THE WORLD by joining the Parade of Men who are marching up the highway of happier living with the COMMANDER, the amazing new Men's Abdominal Supporter.

GET "IN SHAPE" INSTANTLY

AND ENJOY A HAPPY STREAMLINED APPEARANCE

The COMMANDER presents the exclusively designed "INTERLOCKING HANDS" principle for extra support where you need it most. It flattens the burdensome sagging "corporation" and restores to the body the zestful invigorating feeling that comes with firm, sure "bay window" control. Order this new belt today and begin enjoying the pleasure of feeling "in shape" at once.

BREATHE EASIER—TAKE WEIGHT OFF TIRED FEET

The helpful uplifting EXTRA SUPPORTING power of the COMMANDER firmly supports abdominal sag. The instant you pull on the belt you breathe easier... your wind is longer... you feel better!

YOUR BACK IS BRACED—

YOUR CLOTHES FIT BETTER—YOU APPEAR TALLER!

The COMMANDER braces your figure... you look and feel slimmer... your clothes fit you better. Your friends will notice the improvement immediately.

COMMANDER IS NEW AND MODERN!

The absence of gouging steel ribs, dangling buckles and bothersome laces will prove a joy. COMMANDER has a real man's jock type pouch. IT GIVES GENUINE MALE PROTECTION. Try this amazing new belt with full confidence... and at our risk. SEND FOR IT NOW!

MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY



Make
This Test

with your own hands
and feel what we mean

The Secret of the
"Interlocking Hands"

Only COMMANDER contains this New principle. A porous non-stretch material is built into the special stretchy body of the COMMANDER. In the outline of two interlocking hands for EXTRA DOUBLE SUPPORT where you need it most. No BUCKLES, LACES or STRAPS.

Commander Wearers All Over America Say—

"I am sure you will be pleased to know that it is by far the best and most practical supporter I have ever had. I have been pleased to show it to several of my friends and they are likewise impressed with it. You shall probably hear from some of them in the future."
—Dr. A. M. S., Standish, Mich.

"Enclosed find order for another belt. I wouldn't be

without this supporter for ten times what it costs."

—Dr. G. C. S., St. Charles, Ill.

"I recommend the Commander for what it is made for. It sure has been a great help to me. I want to thank you for what it has done. I might add it has helped me more than anything I have ever tried."

—P. N., Fort Knox, Ky.

Above are just a few of the many unsolicited testimonials for the Commander that we receive regularly. Originals of these and others are on file.



BEFORE



AFTER

**FREE
10 DAY TRIAL!**

If it fails to do all we say, send it back and the purchase price will be promptly refunded.

Only **\$2.98**

Special Large
Sizes, 48
to 60.
\$3.98

SIZES
28 to 47

INTRODUCTORY TEN-DAY TRIAL OFFER

WARD GREEN CO., DEPT T-457
113 WEST 57TH STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

Send me the "COMMANDER" for ten days Trial. I will pay postman the special price of \$2.98 plus postage. If not satisfied after wearing it ten days, I may return it And the purchase price will be promptly refunded.

My waist measure is.....My height is.....

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY..... STATE.....

☐ Check here if you enclose \$2.98 with this order and we will pay postage charges. The same refund offer holds.

Husbands! Wives! Want new Pep and Vim?

Thousands of couples are weak, worn-out, exhausted solely because body lacks iron. For new vim, vitality, try Ostrex Tonic Tablets. Contains iron you, too, may need for pep; also supplies vitamin B1. Get this big value now—for only \$1.00! At all drug stores everywhere.

Game & Club Supplies

Transparent Beveled and Weights; Transparent Flats; Tops and Bottoms; Door Pops; Hit and Miss Combinations; Luminous Glasses and Readers; Shiners; Daub; Bicycle and Bee Readers. Rush FREE Catalog requests.

**FREE
Catalog**

"The Old Reliable"

D. SMYTHE CO.

Box 15, Newark, Mo.

LAW

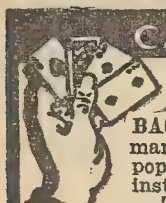
STUDY AT HOME for PERSONAL SUCCESS and LARGER EARNINGS. 88 years expert instruction. Over 108,000 students enrolled. LL B Degree awarded. All texts furnished. Easy payments. Send for FREE BOOK — "Law and Executive Guidance" NOW!

AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. 79-E, 646 N. Michigan Ave., Chi. Ill.

Genuine Steel Engraved Greeting Cards for every occasion. Birthday, Congratulations, Mother, Dad, Baby, etc. Packed 32 cards with matching envelopes to a box. These are beautifully made on finest paper and are an excellent value. Send \$1.00 with order. No stamps. No C. O. D.'s

ETCH-ART

72 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK



CARD TRICKS

Most all Playing Cards are marked in making. TELL ANY CARD FROM BACK. Send \$1.00 for Key-marks for EIGHT different popular decks with complete instructions. No Gamblers.

THE TELLURIUM CO.

Box 678-DA

Wallace, Idaho

USE PEDILIN

The New Foot Medicine for

"ATHLETE'S FOOT ITCH"

On Sale at Your Local Drug Store or Write

UNIVERSAL SYNTHETICS, INC.

Dept. AA-7

100 West 42nd Street

New York 18, N. Y.

BLUE RIBBON WESTERN

(Continued From Page 96)

Well, that's the end of your egg stealing. You shouldn't have got caught in the act."

He killed the snake, gathered the eggs, and went to the house. There was a new spring to his step now as he brought in a load of firewood for the supper fire.

"Give me a good supper, honey, and pack me some vittles. I'm heading out to the range for a while."

"What for?" Jenny asked, puzzled.

"I've just got the answer to what's troubling me. One of Rankin's more decent relatives just showed it to me —out in the hen house."

HE HAD BEEN back in the hills for three days and nights, sleeping by day, prowling around among the cattle belonging to a dozen different owners by night. There was a fading last quarter moon to furnish enough light for him to read brands, and to give him some visibility for a quarter of a mile or more. He did not see any evidence of Rankin.

And then a Spring rainstorm hit the range. At dusk a black cloud boiled up out of the Southwest, pushed by a brisk wind. Lightning crackled behind it, and thunder rolled it along, blacking out the stars and the feeble moon.

Gale had the feeling that this was the kind of time that Rankin would choose to work, depending on the weather to protect him from observation. Hopefully, he put on his slicker and rode out of the post oak thicket he had been camping in. He ducked his head in the face of the driving rain and headed his horse out toward the flats where the cattle were grazing.

He made slow progress in the darkness, and as the flash rain saturated the ground his horse's hooves made sucking sounds in the wet turf. He stopped frequently, listening attentively for any unusual noise. It was too dark for him to see anything distinctly.

Then after an hour, the storm subsided as abruptly as it had started. The rain slackened as the tail end of the stormcloud passed on to the Northeast, and the stars and moon came out, and Gale was able to make

Garlan shrugged. "Who can understand a woman?"

Skinny grinned. "My ol' pappy always used to say that. Guess it held good in his day, too. Get along, you swayback old critter!"

The rain continued. The wagon slipped and lurched, almost losing its load. They reached the top of the ridge and the slope down to *Hacienda Creek* lay tumbling below them, slipperily as a hound dog's tongue.

Now the mares were forced to brace themselves to hold the load. They skidded in the mud, rumps against the breeching-straps. Hightail had stopped cursing and reconciled himself with Nature. Skinny heaved on the lines, now this way, now that; he guided the mares downward. Garlan was quiet.

"Well," said Skinny, "We finally got here."

He threw the lines to the older Estaban, who caught them. He drove the wagon over to the shelter of a wall and he and his son unhooked the mares, peeled the harnesses from them, and turned them loose to graze. With the wall breaking the rain, the lumber would not get so wet.

Pedro Malone was cooking some beef stew. Skinny and Hightail got plates and settled down, chewing on Pedro's biscuits. Garlan settled down and thought of the Alvarados. He wondered how Sean O'Henry had fared with the old don. He hoped that the Irishman got out of the country. Because if he didn't leave, sooner or later he'd either get killed, or he'd kill a Bar S man.

Garlan thought of the night ahead.

HE HAD NO taste, no desire, for a pitched gunfight in the darkness and rain. He had seen enough trouble in his life. He had come to *Baja California* to raise horses; he had come to settle down and become a rancher.

He stirred and drank the hot coffee. The heat of it lifted the chill a little pushing the coldness out of him. He remembered things: he remembered the tracks of his horses, going into the desert; the tracks that never returned. He knew that Mack

Colton had run off those horses. Who else could it be?

His logic was simple and complete. Don Alvarado was losing cattle. He, Ed Garlan, wasn't stealing them. Then the thieves must be the Beer Bottle riders. He sipped coffee again. He was wet, cold, miserable. Yet there was a ride ahead and there was darkness. He tried not to think of these.

Pedro Malone scoured a pan, face lined in the lamplight. Water dripped down from a seam in a tarp. Hightail Smith cursed the drips. Kid Harris hunkered and drew little pictures in the dust. Skinny Marsh sat with his back against the wall—the wall marred by soot and marked by the dynamite blast. The heavy man was quiet, waiting for the next dawn.

Skinny got up. "Where do we meet Don Alvarado, Ed?"

Garlan said, "Walnut Creek," and got to his feet. "My knees are stiff."

Hightail Smith had a bottle. He passed the quart around. "Put a fire inside us that'll keep us warm." He got directly under the drop of water and it hit him in the forehead as he drank. "Damn it!"

"Your broncs," said the older Estaban. "We have them against the far wall, senores. They are waiting there, and we have already saddled them. We have put a little jerked beef in each saddlebag along with the bullets."

"Might be a false alarm," muttered Skinny.

Kid Harris was pulling on his slicker. "Might be, at that." He was walking out in the rain, following Garlan. They went to their horses, five men in the rain.

They took a length of time tightening *cinchas* to their proper tightness. Kid Harris fumbled with his latigo strap. Garlan took his stirrup and rose. Pedro's bronc was cold and mean and wanted to buck. The Mexican turned him hard by the bit and Garlan rode close, quirt falling. He beat the bronc and this took the fight out of him.

Pedro said, "*Gracias, senor.*"

They left the place on a lope. Garlan glanced back and saw the outlines of the Estabans against the puny fire.

The walls of the ruined *hacienda* were dark and heavy behind them, beaten by wild rain, and then distance hid them under the cover of night. Garlan glanced back again. He could see the red coal that was the fire, and then rain hid it, too.

The night would be dark. The Bar S owner felt a futility; he felt as though they were running against something they would not see, could not hear. The rain and darkness were complete, pressing them in; the night had an aide in the rain, for what the darkness did not hide, the rain did.

Kid Harris said, "I wish there'd be a moon."

"On a night like this!" Skinny Marsh was laughing, "What good would a moon do? This rain—"

Again, Garlan felt that futility. The night was too dark, the rain too thick. And how would they know that Colton would hit the *Pinon Mesa* herd? Only a wild guess, as wild as the wind, as wild as the uncontrolled rain. A run in the dark, a cry against the wilderness, a guess in water. . . .

... They were passing the bottle again and it came to him. He drank sparingly; he had small use for hard liquor. But it warmed him and brought heat into his belly. He found himself thinking of Maria Alvarado. She was like this night, wild and without fear, and because of that, she was attractive. She was a magnet pulsing and drawing him, and he knew he would go to her. And he knew that she knew it, also.

He had been on this range but a few days. Circumstance had run against him, pushing episodes together; all in all, they added up to war. No matter which way he viewed it, it amounted to the same thing: war.

Colton was too ambitious; he wanted too much grass. He wanted his own grass; he wanted his neighbors'. Compromise and talk would not change his mind; his mind was set. He was smart enough but his greed overcame his intelligence.

Colton had moved against him, and moved with deadly surprise and suddenness. Behind them the *hacienda* lay in ruin. Bar S horses had headed into the desert, and Colton had been the

only one to drive them. He wanted Bar S grass. And to get it, he would run Bar S horses off that grass.

ED GARLAN turned in saddle, these thoughts in him. He had no taste, no appeal, for this night, and this night's ride. He had fear inside of him. He knew that the Beer Bottle iron would go for guns, if jumped. He had fear for his men and for himself. This whole thing meant a lot to him. The play was without form, without purpose; yet, the rewards were sweet. There were horses to throw colts that would trot beside mares on wild, wobbly legs, there were roadrunners that ran ahead of your horse. And in the hot sunset, there were the peaks and the brush, and somewhere you could hear a quail sing as he rested in an oak tree to escape the coyotes and wolves.

He tried not to think too much. He let his thoughts swing out, covering this range; he thought of other ranges. They were cutting through *mesquite* and *chamiso* and Garlan followed a trail that would lead them to Walnut Creek. The ride was long and Skinny and Hightail had held them up, due to that broken bridge and the slide off the trail. Don Diego Alvarado would wait with a dark impatience, men on horses that pawed the mud and reared in the rain.

"Hightail's horse is down," hollered Pedro.

Garlan turned sharp and rode back. The bronc had hit a dog-hole and gone down, and Hightail was coming out of the mud. He said, "I'm wet as hell," and Garlan said, "How wet is hell?"

Hightail said, "Don't push me!"

Skinny caught Hightail's horse and led him back. "Don't talk to Ed that way. I don't like it." He was joking.

"Sorry, Ed."

Garlan spoke: "Hell's a funny place. Come summer, it's hot as hell; come winter, it's cold as hell. A man feels like hell and he looks like hell. Now you're wet as hell. Me, I think that place is abused too much."

"We'll find out some day." Pedro Malone was laughing.

Hightail said, "T'hell with you all,"

Never Give A Snake The First Bite
out the cattle grazing around him.

With the end of the rain came silence, broken only by the crying of cows and their calves who had become separated. Gale listened.

And then he pulled his horse up short, and listened more intently. He was not mistaken. He was hearing the creak of wagon wheels.

He held his horse steady while he listened more closely until he located the direction of the sound. The wagon was moving slowly along a ravine to his left.

Fearful lest his own horse whinney and betray him, he slid from his saddle and hitched him to a sapling, then made his way quietly toward a point where he would head off the wagon.

It was slow going in the rainsoaked turf, but he got ahead of the wagon, located one of Rankin's scrub cows with a new scrub calf beside her, and hid in the brush.

He did not have long to wait. The wagon rolled up and stopped, while two horsemen, just visible in the poor moonlight, examined the cow.

Gale heard a voice that he recognized as the older of Rankin's two sons. "Here's one, Pap. Looks just like she'd like to have a pedigreed calf." He chuckled at his own joke.

The second horseman dropped a loop over the cow's horns, and then spoke. It was Ben Rankin's voice. "I got her, Jude. Catch up her calf."

Gale tightened his jaws as he watched them tie up the scrub calf and put it in the wagon bed. Old Elmo Rankin lifted another small black calf out of the wagon, and his two sons carried it up and introduced it to its new mother by starting it to nurse her.

"Pap," Jude Rankin said, "you ought to be one of them livestock scientists, figgerin' out how to make two calves grow where one grew before."

GALE CAME out from behind the brush with his gun in his hand.

"Hold still," he said coldly. "Or there's going to be three tombstones growing where there weren't any before. I said steady!"

The three Rankins cursed in uni-

(Continued On Page 100)

Reduce Fat!

**DOCTOR
APPROVED PLAN**

**LOSE 3 to 5
LBS. A WEEK
YET EAT
PLENTY!**

**NO EXERCISE
NO LAXATIVES
NO DRUGS,**

**MASSAGES, STEAMBATHS,
NO STARVATION DIETS.**



"My Grateful Thanks
-to the Kelpidine
Reducing Method. In
just a few weeks I
lost 8 inches thru
the waistline and
hips. It's amazing."
Joan Fleming, New
York City.

Lose as much or as little weight as you like. Simply take a half teaspoonful of KELPIDINE with any meal (preferably at breakfast). EAT AS YOU USUALLY DO. DON'T CUT OUT fatty, starchy foods. Merely CUT DOWN on them.

**That's all
there is to it!**

This is the sure scientific way, so easy, quick, pleasant and absolutely harmless — without tiring or wearing yourself out. This Doctor Approved Reducing Plan safeguards your health and helps you to take off ugly fat and inches around your hips, waistline, abdomen, thighs, legs, buttocks, etc. **PROVE TO YOURSELF!** In only 2 weeks, look in your mirror and you'll be amazed at the change. Start to improve your figure today! You can easily and quickly acquire a gorgeous form—slender, lovely, eye-appealing and glamorous. Don't hide your natural attractiveness under layers of unnecessary fat.

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

\$2

Try it at our expense for 10 days. If you don't lose weight exactly as we say, If you are not 100 per cent delighted with the results your money will be promptly refunded.

USERS SAY

"Doctor Approved."
"Makes one feel wonderful."
"Lost 15 lbs. in 5 weeks."
"Feel so much better."
"Lost 21 lbs. in 4 weeks."
"Went from size 20 dress to size 14."

MAIL COUPON NOW!

American Healthaids Co., Dept. HH-1
871 Broad St., Newark, New Jersey

Enclosed find \$2 for three months' supply of KELPIDINE, postage prepaid. If I am not satisfied, I may return unused portion and my \$2 will be refunded.

Name
Address
City State

PLAY PIANO

with
BOTH HANDS



**NO DRILLS!
NO EXERCISES!**

Don't spend years learning to play piano. Dale Shear's Invention, the amazing copyrighted, exclusive chord-slide simplifier fits any piano and moves back and forth showing all chords, for all songs. Starts you playing popular and semi-classic music with both hands. **AT ONCE!** **NO MUSICAL TALENT NECESSARY**

Even if you have never read a note, you may learn to play by ear and note in an hour! In addition to amazing chord-slide simplifier, you receive absolutely free the famous 25 lesson, self-teaching book, "ABC PICTURE METHOD" including 27 songs arranged so you can play from 4 simple chords.



SEND Rush coupon below! NO Dale Shear guarantees you must play MONEY from actual sheet music and by ear or return within 5 days for full refund. You can't lose . . . write today!

FREE TRIAL COUPON!

DALE SHEAR'S SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Studio 706-B, Struthers 3, Ohio

☐ Rush self-teaching "ABC PICTURE METHOD" book, including 27 songs, with just 4 chords and CHORD-SLIDE INVENTION all complete for \$2.00, plus C.O.D. If not playing in 5 days, I may return for \$2.00 refund. **CANADIANS—Sorry No C.O.D.** **CANADIAN money accepted.** ☐ I enclose \$2.00 (cash, check, money order).

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY

STATE



PILES

Let us tell you of a mild, painless, low cost home treatment perfected by Dr. O. A. Johnson, for 28 years head physician of one of America's Finest Rectal Clinics where thousands of cases have been successfully treated. Write today for Free Trial Offer. No obligation. Address **JOHNSON RECTAL CLINIC, Desk 612, Kansas City, Mo.**

SONGWRITERS

\$100 CASH EVERY MONTH for best song placed with us. Hollywood composers write melody **WITHOUT CHARGE.** Lead sheets and records furnished. Send song material **TODAY** for **FREE EXAMINATION.** You may win \$100. Write for details.

Cinema Song Co., Dept. N-26, Box 670, Bev. Hills, Cal



BLUE RIBBON WESTERN

(Continued From Page 99)

son, Jude and his brother reached—but they reached for their guns instead of the sky. They separated as they slapped their leather, and their weapons came out roaring and spouting orange daggers in the dark. The wagon team shied and old Rankin cursed them and yanked on the reins.

Gale heard the whistle of bullets around him, felt his hat yanked off his head by a slug, and dropped into a crouch. So they wanted a fight! He gave it to them.

As the lead hummed around him he approached the pair of brothers in the half light, holding back his fire until he could make out one of their forms in the gloom, and then he shot, slowly and carefully.

The darkness was filled with the roar of guns and their yellow flames. Nearby cattle spooked, lifted their tails and got out of range. Rankin's team reared up and tried to head for the home corral, despite old Rankin's cursing and jerking at the reins.

It came to Gale that he had wanted to settle the matter this way all along, but that it actually was the Rankin boys who had started the shooting. This made him feel a little better, for even the judge could not criticise him for defending himself. He bore down on the two brothers who kept up their rapid fire.

A bullet hit him in the leg with such force that it whirled him around and sent him to the ground.

"Got him!" Jude shouted. "Got the dirty son—"

"Did you?" Gale answered as he rolled over onto his stomach. He braced his elbow on the ground as Jude came running. Jude stopped at the sound of his voice, and raised his weapon again.

Gale shot him down just as he triggered.

Jude's brother, Ben, went wild. He came rushing at the prone Gale, a curse on his lips, and his gun blazing. Gale shot him as less than a dozen yards separated them, and the man fell beside his brother.

Gale got to his feet, tried his benumbed leg, and found that he could walk. He ignored the wound, and

(Continued On Page 102)

Quick Relief FOUND For Those RHEUMATIC PAIN MISERIES

Often Caused By Fatigue, Over - Exertion or Exposure

*PROOF OF RESULTS

*Made by grateful users—not by us.

"I received the MEDEX last week and it has given me great relief. I am enclosing M.O. for 3 more jars."

A. P. S., Mokelumne Hill, Cal.

"I had a pain in my back the first treatment helped me, I wish I could get it in every home in America!"

W. P., Sherman, Texas

"I had pains in my hips, knees, and ankles, now I am doing fine, please send me 3 more jars."

A. G., Huntington, W. Va.

● HERE'S A NEW REMARKABLE TREATMENT that



Where's Your Pain?

helped thousands of men and women get FAST BLESSED RELIEF, without taking awful-tasting habit-forming medicines. WHEN PAINS STRIKE . . . you just apply wonderful MEDEX 4 CREAM, a quick-acting analgesic counter-irritant where you feel STIFF and have those ACHING THROBBING PAINFUL symptoms of local congestion often associated with RHEUMATISM, ARTHRITIS, SCIATICA, NEURITIS, SWOLLEN OR STIFF JOINTS, BACKACHE, SPRAINS, LUMBAGO, STRAINS, or COLDS, often caused by fatigue, over exertion or exposure.

DETECTIVES

TRAINING — SECRET INVESTIGATIONS — FINGER PRINTS—Easy Method Short Time. Rewards Home Travel — Secret Code Booklet Free. WRITE INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE SYSTEM, 1701 E. Monroe St., N. E., Washington, D. C.

FOR MEN ONLY? THE GALS LOVE IT TOO!



You'll be a riot at your next stag party—with this rare collection of sophisticated wit!

4 COMPLETE BOOKS
— each different
500 Exciting Pages

CARTOONS

Red Hot Lafts — Situations — Girl Photos
Nite Club Stuff — Art Studies — Etc.

JOKES

It's the year's snappiest art collection!

PHOTOS

Don't wait! Supply limited. Send only 98c today — nothing else to pay — for this Art Humor Bonanza. We pay postage.

98c BUYS ALL 4 BOOKS

Sent in plain sealed wrapper
Order yours now!
Money back if not satisfied

LARCH BOOK CO., DEPT. 130-D
42 W. 18 St., New York 11, N. Y.

10 DAY TRIAL OFFER! NO MEDICINE TO TAKE!

Comforting warm, blessed, soothing palliative transient relief usually comes FAST, because MEDEX 4 Secret Formula is compounded of a scientific combination of powerful "PAIN RELIEVERS" doctors often recommend! If pains are severe consult your doctor about MEDEX 4 treatment. Here's your GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY TO TRY THIS WONDERFUL TREATMENT AT HOME—SEND NO MONEY—just order. When postman delivers your full-size jar of MEDEX 4 CREAM with "Special Instructions" pay only \$2.00 C.O.D. plus postage, or send \$2.00 and we pay all postage.

We realize that in some cases pains may be due to symptoms of a serious condition where MEDEX 4 may not prove helpful, therefore we are making this SENSATIONAL 10 DAY TRIAL OFFER to you. No matter what you have used or how many times you have been disappointed before — if you are not satisfied, in fact, overjoyed and amazed with results, just return jar within 10 days and every penny of your hard earned \$2.00 will be quickly refunded. Can anything be fairer than that?

IF YOU ORDER NOW, we will include a "Diet and Special Suggestions Guide," with your MEDEX 4 TREATMENT—WITHOUT ONE CENT OF EXTRA COST. RUSH ORDER NOW—AND YOU MAY BLESS THE DAY YOU DID—SUPREME SALES

100-17, Northern Blvd.

Dept. H-1

CORONA, NEW YORK

**FEET
HURT
LIKE THE
DEVIL
?**

PAULA ANN BENNETT'S FAMOUS
HEALTH CHART
SENT TO YOU
FREE!

**THIS WONDERFUL CHART MAY END
YOUR FOOT SUFFERING FOREVER!**

SEND FOR FREE FOOT HEALTH CHART TODAY—NOW!

PAULA ANN BENNETT
c/o HEALTHE FOOT PRODUCTS CO.
LANSDALE, PA.

Gentlemen: Please send me your free chart which will show the way to foot relief.

Name

Address

City Zone State

"YOU ARE UNDER ARREST!"



Help Bring Crooks to Justice Through Scientific CRIME DETECTION!

I have taught thousands this exciting, profitable, pleasant profession. Let me teach you, in your own home. Learn Finger Printing, Firearms Identification, Police Photography, Criminal Investigation Methods thoroughly, at small cost. 68% of all American Bureaus of Identification employ L. A. S. students or graduates. I can prepare you for this fascinating work, during spare time. Write today, stating age, for "Blue Book of Crime."

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE, 1920 Sunnyside Ave.
Dept. 797-B, Chicago 40, Ill.

MAN'S GREAT ENEMY "Drinking Habit"

It can be treated in your own home! Give yourself a chance. Make a new start in life. You are entitled to it. Stop worrying. Write for free information to . . .

PANN, P. O. Box 781
Dept. P-2, Chicago 90, Illinois

SONGS PUBLISHED

\$1200.00

ADVANCE ROYALTY PAID YEARLY

SONGWRITERS

Send your songs or poems today. Music written for your words without charge. Records, copies, copyright furnished. We have helped many new writers find their first success. Let us try to help you.

HOLLYWOOD TUNESMITHS

1537 No. Vine St., Dept. K-7
Hollywood 28, Cal.

BEAT ANY DICE GAME

Have gold in your pocket . . . When there's silver in your hair. Send me a Stamped Self-Addressed Envelope and I will tell you things about DICE you never knew. **NO POSTAL CARDS ANSWERED.**

Print Name and Address Plainly.

J. F. STEWART BOX 526, HOUSTON, TEXAS

MEN Build a Wholesale Route

GET INTO A Big Pay Business



We Help You Establish a Steady Route of Dealer Customers

Make good weekly earnings selling stores our Big line of 200 products—all daily necessities. Show merchants in your locality a sensational line of self-selling counter goods. Retail at 5c and 10c. You make up to 112% commission. No large capital required. Easy to Start.

A fortune spent for National Advertising has made our products known from coast to coast. Send for our booklet "Your Opportunity in a Wholesale Business of Your Own." It's **FREE**—no obligation. **WRITE TODAY!**

WORLD'S PRODUCTS CO., Dept. 78-B Spring, Ind.

6 Selected DRESSES \$3.99



A dress for every day within your means. Assorted Styles, Colors and Materials. **USED** but **CLEANED**—Some may need repairs. Sizes 12 to 18 only. Send \$1.00 deposit, balance C.O.D. plus postage. **SATISFACTION GUARANTEED** or purchase price refunded promptly. **FREE CATALOG.**

OUR BETTER DRESSES (used) \$3.90

Sizes 12 to 20 and 38 to 44 4 for **\$3.90**

Cotton DRESSES (used) 5 for \$2.95 Sizes **OUR BETTER GRADE, 3 for \$2.55** 12 to 20

COLUMBIA MAIL ORDER CO.

548 Grand St., Dept. 149-D New York 2, N. Y.

BLUE RIBBON WESTERN

(Continued From Page 100)

gave his attention to old Elmo Rankin who was still cursing his excited team. He jumped on the brake, grabbing the side of the wagon bed for support, and shouted at Rankin:

"Drop those reins and get out of there, Rankin."

OLD RANKIN saw the gun under his nose, and all the fight went out of him. He stood up in the wagon and pulled against the horses with all his weight, finally stopping their wild bucking. Gale's gun was within three feet of his face when he looked around.

"Now get down out of there."

Rankin stepped out over the wheel of the wagon and stood on the ground, his hands loosely at his side. He was unarmed. And he was a broken man.

"You still say you wasn't stealing my calves?" Gale asked. "Not that it matters, now that I've caught you."

Old Rankin said, "My boys, did you—"

"Yes, I killed them. What about it, you admit it now?"

"Yes, you was right. What's the use in me denyin' it now? But you can't kill me—"

"Why can't I?"

"Because I ain't got a gun. You can't shoot an unarmed man—"

"All right, I can't shoot an unarmed man. But I don't need to shoot you. When I get some witnesses out here, and they see where I slit the skin of all my new calves and put one of those aluminum beer tokens under the skin, I don't think I'll have any trouble in proving that you're the snake that swallowed my china egg."

"I don't know what you mean about me swallowing any egg—"

"Sure, you don't. But you swallowed it just the same. Now back up to that wagon wheel. I'm going to tie you up right here in the henhouse till I go get the sheriff and a dozen witnesses."

"Henhouse?" Old Rankin repeated dazedly. "Are you crazy?"

"I was for a while," Gale answered gravely. "But not any more."

THE END

the most entertaining volume
you can offer a bachelor or a
bachelorette, providing his wife
isn't looking.

has first funny Telegraph

SELECTED FROM MAN'S BEST
PRIVATE LIBRARIES FOR A REALLY
MASCULINE, DELIGHTFUL, NIGHTSFUL ENJOYMENT!

TALES for MALES

Edited by Ed Fitzgerald

Thousands of men already made the eye-opening discovery that once started, "TALES FOR MALES" can't be put down until read from cover to cover. From the first word to the last you are swept along on an irresistible tidal wave of rollicking, he-man, spiceful entertainment. "TALES FOR MALES" contains the kind of vivid, exciting reading that prompted the Houston Post to say: "If there is a milligram of male hormone in you, you should keep a copy of this collection about in some private place . . ." You can enjoy "TALES FOR MALES" for 10 DAYS FREE! Simply fill out and mail coupon shown below. Don't delay—the books are going fast!

**YOU'LL ENJOY MEETING THE MANY
BEWITCHING WOMEN
IN "TALES FOR MALES"**

MEET "MUZIO"
— the Havana water-front songstress. Sailors from every corner of the globe came to spend a few unforgettable hours of shore leave with her.

MEET "JOAN MERRY"
— tantalizing voluptuous burlesque queen. Captivates her wide-eyed audience and two watchful guardians of the law . . . who never miss Joan's artful strip act.

MEET "SUZY"
— exotic South Sea beauty of Tongatabu. Until this day the eyes of sailor Samish take on a mischievous gleam at the mention of Suzy's name. And there are many more luscious lovelies in "Tales for Males."

While supply lasts—
with your request for
TALES FOR MALES

"TALES FOR MALES" CONTENTS SUIT EVERY MAN'S TASTE

THE LOVE KICK

— William Saroyan

MY VIEWS ON MARRIAGE—W. C. Fields

HE WAS SO GOOD TO HER, Frank Sullivan

WHAT EVERY YOUNG WIFE SHOULD KNOW

— James Thurber

BUNDLING: AN OLD YANKEE CUSTOM

George S. Chappell

LOVE OR HOW TO WOO AND WIN A WOMAN

— J. Goodman and A. Green

... plus many more unusual exhilarating tales!

WHAT GOES ON IN LADIES' REST ROOMS

— C. A. Hamilton

I LEARN SOMETHING ABOUT SEX

— Corey Ford

STRIP TEASE

— George Weller

FASHIONS IN LOVE

— Clarence Day, Jr.

Free



What Every Man Should Really Know About Women!

For a short time only this divulging book "DAMES ARE DANGEROUS" will be given absolutely free of extra charge with your order of "TALES FOR MALES." Just off the press! This book of hilarious intimate revelations is now released to the public for the first time! These enlightening views on the dangerous enchanting side of women will open your eyes! It rips the mask off their fair faces! Yes you'll wonder why they were known as the modest, weaker sex. Remember men—forwardness is forward! While our limited supply holds out we advise you to grab this added treat immediately!

CADILLAC PUBLISHING CO., Inc.
Dept. F-321, 220 5th Ave., New York 1, N. Y.

FREE 10 DAY EXAMINATION

CADILLAC PUBLISHING CO., Inc., Dept. F-321

220 Fifth Ave., New York 1, N. Y.

Rush to me "TALES FOR MALES" Plus the

FREE BOOK "DAMES ARE DANGEROUS" in

plain wrapper. I will deposit with postman on

delivery, \$2.98 plus postage. If after 10 days

I am not completely delighted my money will

be refunded.

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY & ZONE STATE Age ..

If you wish to save postage, enclose with coupon

only \$2.98. Same money back guarantee.

Canada Orders—No C. O. D.—Send \$3.50



**HUNDREDS
OF PAGES
OF DIVERTING
ENTERTAINMENT!**

Just A Few of the Rave Reviews!

"... it's lusty reading..." —Variety

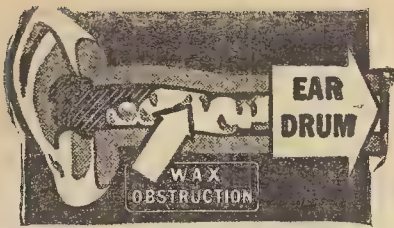
"... grand book for chilly nights..." —Baltimore News Post

"... great book to have at your bedside..." —Raleigh News & Observer

SEND NO MONEY

Don't send a cent! We invite you to read this book for 10 nights . . . and days, too, at our expense. Just fill in and mail the coupon to receive one of the few joys available to the male sex. Just deposit with postman on delivery \$2.98 plus postage. After 10 days of impartial appraisal, you must decide this book is worth not \$2.98 but \$298.00 in fun and thrills or your MONEY BACK GUARANTEED! Mail coupon now!

"DAMES ARE DANGEROUS"



HARD OF HEARING?

You can't hear well if impacted wax blocks ear canals and presses on sensitive ear drums.

Take Doctor's Advice!

Thousands of folks are now hearing normal again and are no longer bothered by buzzing, ringing, hissing head noises, dizziness, ear irritation, since they removed hard impacted wax. But follow doctor's advice. Never, never try to remove impacted wax with finger nails, tooth-picks, hairpins or any instrument. The safe way is with Orotune Ear Drops. Tests by well known laboratory prove them absolutely harmless used as directed.

Orotune has brought better hearing to so many who were deafened by impacted wax that you owe it to yourself to try it.

A. M. Beetchenon, Newark, N. J., writes: "Before Using Orotune Ear Drops, I was so deafened that I could not hear the clock tick. After using Orotune, I can now hear the clock tick with both ears."

SEND NO MONEY. Pay postman \$2, plus postage and C. O. D. charges for 3 months supply. If you send \$2 with order, we pay all postage charges. Order today. You'll be amazed how clearly and distinctly you HEAR again when wax obstruction is removed!

HARVIN CO., 117 W. 48 St., Dpt. F, New York 19, N. Y.



The Trading Post

By THE PILGRIM



HIDDEN POWER

Draw things to you. Thousands have won over obstacles — Use the system that may lead to Power—Money—Love—Success. You get full information only cents in coin or stamps.

113 W. 57 St.

Dept. 1907-A, N.Y.C. 19

MIND MASTER



STOP TOBACCO?

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have with Tobacco Redeemer. Write for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved many men. Caution: Use only as directed. 30 Years in Business. **FREE BOOK** THE NEWELL COMPANY 266 Clayton, Sta., St. Louis 5, Mo.

10 USED DRESSES

\$5⁹⁵

Sizes 12 to 20. Assorted colors, prints, and sizes. Better used dresses. Sizes 12 to 44.

Children's washable cotton dresses. Assorted colors and prints.

Mail \$1.00 deposit with order, balance C.O.D. plus postage. Send for Free Catalog of wearing apparel for entire family, and money-back guarantee terms

KINGS MAIL ORDER CO.

191 Canal St., Dept. 205-D, New York 13

STAMMER ?

This new 128-page book, "Stammering, Its Cause and Correction," describes the Bogue Unit Method for scientific correction of stammering and stuttering—successful for 46 years. Benj. N. Bogue, Dept 7257, CircleTower, Indianapolis 4, Ind.



EVERYBODY KNOWS about Lewis and Clark, explorers of the Columbia River. Somewhere around the third or fourth grade of grammar school, the American History book is sure to have a picture of the two famous pioneers smoking the pipe of peace with an Indian chief, and a few pages before or after, there's another pic of the two of them paddling a canoe like mad down the foaming mother of waters.

As usual, the history books don't know the half of it, or if they do, they never get around to telling it. Sacajawea, for instance, wasn't in your fourth-grade reader, or mine. Sacajawea, otherwise known as the Bird-Woman, was a Shoshone Indian, captured as a child by the Minnetarees, and later sold as a slave to a French immigrant named Charboneau. Charboneau brought the Indian girl up with a good deal more attention that was usually lavished on slaves, and when she reached womanhood, he fell in love with her and married her. She was a young woman with her first baby when Charboneau was hired by Lewis and Clark as their guide through the Northwest region. Indian-style, the Bird-Woman refused to be left behind. She took her baby, and accompanied the expedi-

THE TRADING POST

tion, as, probably, the first woman explorer.

With her child in her arms, Sacajawea climbed rocky bluffs alongside the men of the expedition, ran the rapids with them, and took all the risks and hardships of the journey as a matter of course. Captain Clark, from all the stories that are told, seems to have been bothered in the general region of his chivalry now and then, and there were probably many moments when the white men wished she had been left behind. But an unexpected turn of events made her, in the end, more useful to the expedition than her husband.

THE PARTY had crossed the Mississippi and followed the Missouri into Indian Territory. They went up the Jefferson to a point near where the town of Dillon, Montana now stands. and then they were stuck. To cross the Rockies they would need horses and guides, and the only hope of getting either was from the Indians. It was a neighborhood frequently preyed upon by the fierce tribes of Blackfeet, and the only peaceful Indian party the explorers met was a half-starved group of Shoshones going east for buffalo on the Missouri River.

The famished tribe was so terrified of the Blackfeet that, out of sheer relief, they greeted the explorers with open arms and the pipe of peace as soon as they were identified. The Chief, probably the original of the ever-present picture of the pipe-smoking party, was friendly enough; he even took off his moccasins to indicate, in the Indian tradition, that he was on the up-and-up. The gesture was always interpreted to mean, "May I go barefoot forever if I do not deal truly with you." But, good as his intentions were, he couldn't see his way clear to lending horses and men to the stranger, when his own people were on the verge of starvation. He had to take his tribe east to the buffalo grounds, and could spare no time or provisions.

The explorers, thinking that it was possible the Indian did not fully understand their needs, finally decided

(Continued On Page 106)

CUT OUT THIS BAND TO FIND RING SIZE

HAND CARVED

RAM'S HEAD RING

SOLID STERLING SILVER

Only \$4.95

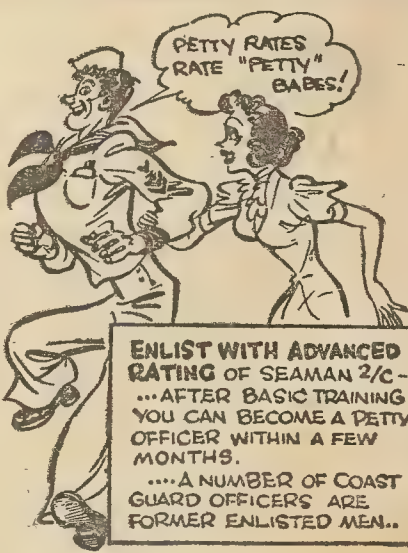
Postpaid WE PAY TAX For MEN and WOMEN

NEVER BEFORE - such a beautiful and unusual ring - an exact replica of our original Hand Carved RAM'S HEAD - designed by Master Silversmiths in solid sterling silver. Rare design, intricate detail and workmanship makes this a ring that everyone will notice and envy. BE THE FIRST to own and wear this startling and new ring!

SEND NO MONEY! Just clip this ad and mail with your name, address and ring size. Pay postman only \$4.95 plus few cents postage - or send cash and we will pay postage. This is the Best Ring Value in America - SATISFACTION GUARANTEED!

HOLLYWOOD CRAFTSMEN

708 N. La Cienega ★ HOLLYWOOD 46, CALIF.



ENLIST WITH ADVANCED RATING OF SEAMAN 2/C - ...AFTER BASIC TRAINING YOU CAN BECOME A PETTY OFFICER WITHIN A FEW MONTHS.A NUMBER OF COAST GUARD OFFICERS ARE FORMER ENLISTED MEN..

JOIN THE U.S. COAST GUARD

Does Your STOMACH, BOWELS Need Help?

Due to Faulty Elimination



Do you suffer from the symptoms of GAS, BLOAT PAINS, INDIGESTION, LACK OF APPETITE, UPSET STOMACH, COATED TONGUE, BAD BREATH AND SKIN often caused by functional constipation?

If these non-organic stomach and bowel disturbances make you feel older, lose sleep, feel tired, nervous and miserable, then, by all means, try wonderful quick acting NATURAL RED EAGLE HERB MEDICINE and see what it can do for you!

This amazing formula actually contains, not 5 or 10 but 24 selected roots, herbs, botanicals, and other vital ingredients, gathered from different parts of the world, and compounded, under the supervision of a registered pharmacist, into a wonderful aid to HELP NATURE remove the lingering, clogging waste matter from sluggish bowels, that may be causing you your miseries. It has given blessed transient relief to thousands of grateful people, who will not be without it, and bless the day they learned of this grand, RED EAGLE HERB MEDICINE.

HERE IS NEW HOPE—TRY IT ON OUR 5-DAY TRIAL OFFER—SEND NO MONEY When package arrives, deposit with postman only \$2.00 plus C.O.D. and postage, or send \$2.00 and we will pay all postage. CAUTION: Use only as directed, and if you are not happy, in fact overjoyed with results, simply return unused portion within 5 days after trial and we will gladly refund every penny of your \$2.00. SUPPLIES ARE LIMITED, SO PLEASE RUSH ORDER NOW TO:

ROYAL CO., Dept. 109-A
100-17 Northern Blvd., Corona, New York

**USED
Correspondence
Courses**

**COMPLETE
Home-Study
COURSES**

and self-instruction textbooks, slightly used. Rented, sold, exchanged. All subjects. 100% satisfaction. Cash paid for used courses. Full details and 100-page illustrated bargain catalog FREE. Write

NELSON CO., 1139 S. Wabash Ave.
Dept. 52, CHICAGO 5, ILL.

OZARK LANDS

FOR ALL PURPOSES

For Your Pleasure and Profit

Priced from **\$5.00 Per Acre** and upwards

Also Actual River Frontages
SEND FOR FREE LIST AND LITERATURE
HUBBARD

424C MINNESOTA KANSAS CITY, KANSAS



6 DRESSES \$5.00

\$1 DEPOSIT REQUIRED

Cleaned, pressed, and repaired. Sizes 12 to 42. Assorted styles and colors. All clothing dry cleaned.

Men's used work shirts, 98c; Ladies' skirts, ea. 65c; Girls' dresses, ea. 55c; Bummage, 15 assorted pieces, \$2.25.

Surplus army clothes. All kinds.

SEND FOR FREE CATALOG.

HERCULES SALES CO., Dept. DAA
225 Division St., New York 2, N. Y.

Illustrated Comic Booklets

Sell our ILLUSTRATED COMIC BOOKLETS and other NOVELTIES. Each booklet size 4 1/4 x 2 1/4. We will send 25 assorted booklets prepaid upon receipt of \$1.00 or 75 assorted booklets sent prepaid upon receipt of \$2.00. Wholesale novelty price list sent with order only. No orders sent C.O.D. Send Cash or Money-order.

REPSAC SALES CO.

1 W. 13th St., Dept. 50-G, New York 11, N. Y.

BLUE RIBBON WESTERN

(Continued From Page 105)

to ring Sacajawea in on the confab as interpreter. The Indian woman took her place in the formal atmosphere of the council, with bent head and downcast eyes, making it clear she was only a lowly female among great chiefs. She sat quietly as the tribal chieftain began his speech.

The white men, he said, were to know him by his peace-name, which was Cameahwait, meaning Come-and-Smoke. (The Indian generally had several names, one for family use, one for friends, one for enemies.) The pronouncing of the name got an extraordinary reaction from the Bird-Woman. She jumped up and ran to the Chief, crying for joy; she had not dared to look at him before, but after hearing his name, had looked up and recognized him as her brother.

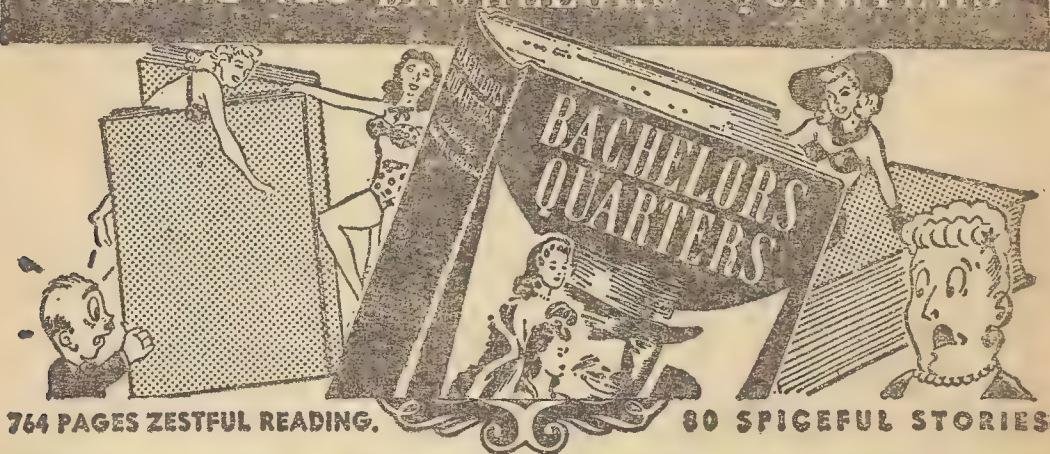
The long-separated sister and brother immediately went into a long harangue, and—you guessed it—Lewis and Clark got through to the Columbia River with Shoshone help.

THE TWO men kept a running diary of their experiences on the trip, and Captain Lewis, in particular, made some interesting notes on things he saw and did. On one occasion, he had just finished killing a buffalo, and was standing, watching the clumsy creature die. He had completely forgotten to reload his rifle, and was caught empty-handed when he discovered that a brown bear had crept up behind to within a few yards of him. The bear was advancing, and there was no time to load and fire; Lewis did what sensible men do. . . he turned and ran.

But the bear kept gaining. The Captain thought vainly about a tree; the nearest one was too far. Then he had an inspiration. The river was only a few feet away, and had sloping sides. He plunged in, and waded out to the farthest point at which he could stand. Bears are not afraid of water, but *this* bear was shorter than the man; he would have had to swim to reach Lewis; and though the animal would not, ordinarily, hesitate at a little dip in the hope of a meal, he apparently had sense enough to

WHO NEEDS A WIFE

When He Has BACHELOR'S QUARTERS



INTIMATE TALES OF WOMEN AS YOU LIKE THEM BY MEN WHO KNOW THEM BEST

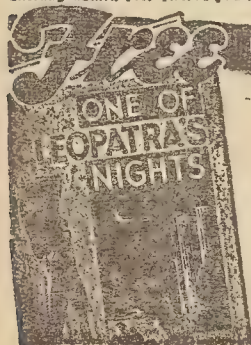
Maybe you're a bachelor with a dozen females on your string, or maybe you're a married man and the string leads to your wife's apron, but brother, you're going to learn something new about women on almost every page of "BACHELOR'S QUARTERS", the book that concentrates on the man's point of view. Every tale in this 764 page book is written by a master story-teller, by those who have understood and probed the deepest and most bewitching secrets of women as they really are. Here you will find sophisticated, worldly females, innocents led astray, tigresses who await no invitation, designing, scheming women who can make shambles of a man's life... these and many more in the most stimulating, story-packed book that ever kept you up nights. Read for 10 days FREE, at absolutely no risk. If you don't agree it is the most complete, most fascinating encyclopaedia of WOMEN IN ACTION, it won't cost you a single cent. Rush the coupon today and get your copy while we still have one!

THE CRITICS LOVED IT!

Reviewed by many of the largest newspapers, BACHELOR'S QUARTERS has been widely acclaimed the answer to a man's prayer, in book form. You'll discover the reason yourself when you meet, between the covers of BACHELOR'S QUARTERS, some of the most unusual and exciting women ever offered you in print.

SEND NO MONEY

Enjoy this big book for 10 days free trial. Meet Clarissa, Cosette, Rinty, Kato and her sisters-in-adventure without risk to your purse (although we don't guarantee what will happen to your pulse). Simply fill in and mail the free gift coupon. On arrival, pay the postman only \$2.98 plus postage and C.O.D., or enclose \$3.00 with the coupon and receive both books postpaid. We guarantee that BACHELOR'S QUARTERS will arouse a gleam in your eye, or your MONEY BACK! Rush the coupon NOW!



Cleopatra has been called one of the greatest temptresses the world has ever known. Her beauty was told and retold in fable and play for centuries, but to this day no one is exactly sure why she had such irresistible power over men. Here, in book form, you have Cleopatra in all her famous beauty, see her as a master writer portrays one of her typical nights. You'll say this revealing book alone is worth the purchase price of BACHELOR'S QUARTERS, and it's yours ABSOLUTELY FREE if you act now!

HERALD PUB. CO., Inc., 45 E. 17th St., N. Y. 3, N. Y.

Here's What Goes On

IN BACHELOR'S QUARTERS

THE DOCTOR & THE DOCTOR'S WIFE

Ernest Hemingway

JIMMY AND THE DESPERATE WOMAN

D. H. Lawrence

THE WOMAN WHO MADE ANATOLE

FRANCE

Francis Gribble

THE MAN WITH ONLY FIVE WIVES

Admiral Mark Kerr

DUSKY RUTH

A. E. Coppard

THE HOUSE OF THE SINNER

THE LADY WHO COULDN'T BLUSH

Caradoc Evans

THE GARMENTS OF A GIRL

Catulle Mendès

THE HONEY-MOON SURPRISE

J. Y. F. Cooke

LOVE AND A FUR COAT

Clement Wood

Hjalmar Rodenberg

... and that's only the beginning!

HERALD PUBLISHING CO., Dept. QH-6

45 East 17th Street, New York 3, N. Y.

☐ RUSH my copy of BACHELOR'S QUARTERS

plus FREE "ONE OF CLEOPATRA'S NIGHTS."

On arrival I will deposit with postman early \$2.98

plus postage. I may return the books for full

refund within 10 days if not completely satisfied.

☐ I enclose \$3.00 to save postage and C.O.D.

charges. Same free offer & money back guarantee.

NAME

ADDRESS

City Zone State Age



Reveals His Ancient Secrets

Black Herman is alleged to have said that by following the secret instructions revealed in this volume, anyone may obtain money, love, power, success, jobs, and happiness . . . for he says that the secrets revealed in this volume would unlock a store-house of knowledge and power. If you never thought it possible to get results . . . If you seem to be walking around in circles without making progress . . . If your luck never seems to reach you . . . If your loved ones seem to be drifting away . . . If you seem to be carrying an evil condition that's holding you down . . . If you seem to be persecuted . . . get the Amazing Secrets of Black Herman to help you overcome these conditions. Not for the \$6.00 price marked in every volume, but for the amazingly low price of only \$1.00. Send only \$1.00 for this wonderful volume NOW and start to benefit by the blessings given you by Black Herman, your Friend and counsellor.



This Book Purports to Tell You How to
 Master the mysteries of Astrology
 Gain love of opposite sex
 Make people do your bidding
 Be lucky in any game
 Cast a spell on anyone
 Better your condition
 Bring happiness to broken lives
 Unite people for marriage
 Remove the source of unhappiness
 Interpret your dreams numerically
 Gain mastery of occultism
 Develop your psychic power
 Know what others are doing

MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE

CONTINENTAL CO.
 126 Lexington Ave., Dept. AB, New York 16, N. Y.

ACCOUNTANT

BECOME AN EXPERT

Executive Accountants and C. P. A.'s earn \$2,000 to \$10,000 a year. Thousands of firms need them. We train you to qualify at home in spare time for C. P. A. examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous experience unnecessary. Personal training under supervision of staff of C. P. A.'s. Placement counsel and help. Write for free book, "Accountancy, the Profession That Pays." **G. I. APPROVED.**
LASALLE Extension University, 417 So. Dearborn St.
A Correspondence Institution Dept. 772-H Chicago 5, Ill.

SECRETS of the PSALMS



"Through a pious life and by a rational use of the Psalms, you may obtain the grace of God, the favor of Princes, and the Love of your fellow man," says the author.

Here are some of the amazing things he tells you about: Psalm to receive instruction or information through a Dream or Vision, Psalm to escape danger, Psalm to become safe from Enemies, Psalm to raise you GOOD after committing a heavy sin, Psalm to make you fortunate in everything you try to do, Psalm to free yourself from Evil Spirits, Psalm to make peace between Man and Wife.

MIDGET BIBLE FREE

Now you can carry the Bible with you at all times. (Smallest Bible in the World). Many people feel that this is of great value in obtaining things you desire.

SEND NO MONEY Just send your name and address Today and pay postman only \$1 plus postage on delivery. I positively **GUARANTEE** that you will be more than delighted within 5 days or your money will be returned promptly on request and no questions asked. Order At Once.

NATIONAL PRODUCTS

1472 Broadway, Dept. DA-1, New York 18, N. Y.

* SONG POEMS WANTED

To Be Set to Music
 * Publishers need new songs. Submit one or more of your best poems for immediate consideration.

* Any subject. Send poem.
 * Phonograph Records Made—Five Star Music

* **FIVE STAR MUSIC MASTERS**
 660 BEACON BLDG., BOSTON 8, MASS.

BLUE RIBBON WESTERN

(Continued From Page 108)

to get marked down to the cost of the trip. At any rate, if the buffalo didn't get there too fast, he would duck out of the way into a convenient crevice in the rocks and let the herd go thundering past. By the time they got to the edge of the cliff, they had gathered too much momentum to stop and hundreds of shaggy bodies would go hurtling over to pile up on the river banks below. The hunting party could then descend at their leisure, take what meat they wanted, and leave the rest for the wolves.

The method was wasteful of buffalo meat, but on the hole helped to preserve Indian flesh.

CAPTAIN LEWIS also included in his narrative a detailed set of instructions for building a cache, the safety deposit vault of the plainsman. A cache, or "cash," as the Captain spelled it, was made by selecting a high dry spot, marking out a roughly circular area, and removing the turf or sod within the marked area, as nearly as possible in one piece. The dirt below was then dug out very carefully, so as not to spill any on the ground to betray the hiding place. It was collected on a piece of skin or cloth, and dumped into the nearest stream, to remove all traces. The bottom of the hole was lined with sticks and dry hay, to make a flooring three or four inches thick, and the walls were protected in the same way. Skins, food, or other perishables could be left in one of these holes, covered up with the original piece of sod, and be safe from water, snow, fire, or prying visitors until the owner came back to claim his own.

ONE of the most colorful descriptions in the diary is a story of the danger of ravines, a danger that later was only too well known to tenderfeet in the West. A cloudburst one day sent the whole party to seek shelter from the driving rain in what appeared to be a dry ravine. Then, suddenly, before they realized what was happening, the explorers found themselves standing, not on land, but in a river bed. A body of water came

THE TRADING POST

rushing down the dry valley so fast they could barely climb quickly enough to get away from it. Mud, rocks, and equipment went before the raging torrent. Sacajawea had barely time to snatch up the net in which her child lay at her feet; Captain Clark lost his compass, and Carboneau his gun, pouch, and powder.

The water rose to fifteen feet in a matter of seconds; it was up to Clark's waist before he had even begun to climb. A second more, and he would have been washed over the falls a little farther down. As it was, the narrow escape left them luckier than those of the party who had been out on the plains when the storm started. A shower of hail, driven by a fierce wind, had cut the exposed travelers like so many knives, and they were found, after the storm subsided, sore and bleeding.

These sudden prairie storms were the scourge of later settlers, but Lewis and Clark's story is probably the first written account of one of them.

THE END



A Thrillingly Glamorous

BUST LINE

Instantly!



with

Outlaws

Styled in
HOLLYWOOD



Now you can enjoy an irresistible bust contour with these new bust pads that become part of you!

Don't feel embarrassed because of flat chest and unappealing body lines a minute longer! Follow the example of movie stars by wearing OUTLAWS. Instantly you take on an excitingly desirable appearance. OUTLAWS are made of smooth foam rubber and rayon brocade, trimmed with dainty lace. They're light as a feather, adjustable and ABSOLUTELY UNDETECTABLE under your most revealing lingerie. Try them!

Mail coupon today for OUTLAWS. When package arrives in plain wrapper, with SENSATIONAL SURPRISE OFFER included, pay postman only \$2.98 plus postage. Money back if not thrilled with results!

Free 10-DAY TRIAL!
SEND NO MONEY

HOLLYVINE FOUNDATIONS, Dept. 247
6411 Hollywood Blvd.,
Hollywood 28, Calif.

Rush OUTLAWS by return mail in plain package. I'll pay postman \$2.98 plus postage. If not thoroughly delighted, I may return them in 10 days for immediate refund.

Name

Address

City Zone State

Enclose \$2.98 and we pay postage.
Brassiere Size Tea Rosa or White

RHEUMATIC PAINS?

take this sufferer's advice

Mr. I. K., Wilmington, Del.

Advises every one suffering from
Sciatica — to try RUMAL Ointment

He says, 'God Bless You For RUMAL OINTMENT.'

'Mr. I. K. of Wilmington, Delaware, writes: For years
pains of Rheumatism — Arthritis —

I have suffered with agonizing pains of Rheumatism. Nothing seemed to help much. Then a friend of mine suggested that I try a preparation called RUMAL. I was skeptical but I had nothing to lose so I sent for a jar. I tried it and am happy to say that I got relief from the very first application. It's a God-send to have RUMAL in the house for when those awful pains strike, I'm prepared.'



I don't care how long you have been suffering the agonies of rheumatic, arthritic sciatic, neuralgic pains—I want you to try a remedy that is really good.

It must be good, for it has been bringing blessed palliative relief to thousands of sufferers since 1919—over 26 years.

And the best part is that you don't risk one penny in trying RUMAL—you can't lose—only gain by doing it.

RUMAL is a compound of 5 powerful ingredients widely known to the medical profession as fast pain relievers.

You apply RUMAL as directed to the painful area. Soon you feel a glowing, soothing warmth as the pains disappear fast.

SEND NO MONEY NOW for RUMAL. Just mail name and address—now. When postman delivers

package pay him only \$2 plus postage and C. O. D. charges. If you prefer, enclose \$2 and we pay all postal charges. Guarantee: If after using 1 jar of RUMAL you don't feel that it has helped you, you get your money back.

RUMAL MEDICINAL PRODUCTS

206 Division St., Dept. 27-C, New York 2, N. Y.



Used Clothing BARGAINS DRESSES 6 for \$3.49

Lovely sweaters, 8 for \$2.25; Ladies' Coats, \$1.50; other bargains. Army clothes—work clothes. Free catalog. \$1.00 deposit with order. Merchandise guaranteed or purchase price refunded.

FAMOUS SALES CO., Dept. F5
2376 West 27 St., Brooklyn 24, N. Y.

WANT GOOD LUCK FAST?

No matter what your hard luck is, unlucky in Games, Love, Health or Business, thousands say the Master Prayer brings Good Fortune and Protection from evil. Almost all Christian People have faith in the tremendous, mighty, never-failing POWER of the Master Prayer, which has helped thousands everywhere—and I believe will help you too.

The Master Prayer is inscribed indelibly on an individually hand carved Dursacat Heart, a Permanent Charm for those who have had luck. Write me today enclosing \$1.00 and I will send you the Master Prayer Charm at once so you may change your luck.

FREE with each order. Talismanite Seal, reproduced in blood-red ink on Egyptian mottled Parchment.

PAX CO., 128 Lexington Ave., Dept. AA, New York 16, N. Y.

What Every Mason Wants



We have Important Masonic books for Blue Lodge, Chapter, Commandery, Scottish Rite, and Shrine.

OUR RITUALS ARE USED THE WORLD OVER

Send for free catalog of books and rituals for Masons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, Knights of Columbus, etc.
EZRA A. COOK, Publisher, P. O. 796, Lj Chicago 90, Ill.

THIS GRASS IS MINE

(Continued From Page 82)

Colton sat down, and bent over at the waist. He dropped his gun.

Skinny Marsh said, "He get you, Ed?"

"He shot too fast," said Garlan.

Colton went down, breaking in two. Ed Garlan loaded his gun, shoving fresh cartridges into the magazine. He was not aware of this action. Later, he remembered it.

Skinny said, "Let's get out of here."

Garlan glanced at Martinez. The man had his nose deep in a puddle of water. He couldn't breath, that way. They left the two men there and walked into the moonlight and so met Don Alvarado.

Garlan asked, "You get them all?"

"Some got away. Some are dead. Some are wounded."

Garlan went to the don's horse and put his head against the bronc's mane. He stood like that, and the old man ran his hand through Garlan's hair. "You have lost your hat, my hijo."

"It's back there," said Ed Garlan. "Back there with Martinez and Colton." He got his strength again. "They'll never steal again."

Don Alvarado crossed himself.

Hightail Smith came riding up, leading Garlan's horse and Skinny Marsh's. "We missed the fun, Ed," he said.

"That was no fun," said Garlan.

Don Alvarado was speaking without tone. "My men, they will take charge here, *senor*. I have talked with a Beer Bottle man. Colton has no living relatives to take his iron. The land and cattle will probably go to the territory. I did not tell Maria where I rode this night. Perhaps you would ride with me to the *rancho*?"

Garlan found stirrup.

They rode, the two of them, toward the south. The wind was cold and the stars clear. Garlan found again his old assurance. He kept thinking of Maria. He would see her soon, and he was glad of that.

THE END

Special Offer TO LOVERS

Don't shrink from the love that is rightly yours. Learn the many proven ways of making and receiving love. Here lovers are told how to hold the mate of their choice. You quickly learn how to win, and how to avoid heartbreaking mistakes, when making love. More astounding, these three books explain how you can get the most out of love, the proper technique of approach, and the tender art of the kiss. Help your own destiny by placing your order today . . . look forward to tomorrow with renewed love interest.

**ALL 3
BOOKS \$
ONLY.. 1**

Yes . . . if you act now all three of the amazing books are yours for only \$1.00. Or if you only desire one, they are 50c each. This is a SPECIAL OFFER for a limited time only, so don't delay a day. Mail the coupon below NOW . . . get your copies while the supply lasts.



Much has been said on this delicate subject, yet it is a known fact that kissing is an art. Movies and the stage devote hours to perfecting the exact kiss to portray the proper emotion for one scene . . . yet, that emotion must convey itself to the audience. Correct kissing expresses honest attractiveness and is an expression of appreciation. To master this art is to enjoy life. There are many variations and this frank book, "The Art of Kissing," explains and discusses 23 kinds of kisses. Only **50c**



"TRUE LOVE GUIDE" is an unusual book, teaching you how to woo, win and hold love . . . marriage problems are answered and solved in easy-to-understand language. All has been scientifically told by those who know and who are experienced on this subject. The planning of your future happiness may be found in these interesting pages . . . told without hiding any of the things you should know. It is not a novel, but a guide for the happiness you deserve from love. Send for your copy today. Only **50c**



Understand the modern way of writing the love letters your loved ones expects to receive. This understanding book gives you 47 actual model letters on love, courtship and marriage. All situations are intelligently and effectively dealt with, which are a part of your correspondence. You will also find poems and thoughts of love which are very helpful to quote under the proper circumstance. You will consider this book a priceless aid to writing the love letters you desire. Only **50c**

5 DAYS Examination

We know you will definitely enjoy these helpful and interesting books . . . that is the reason we dare make this offer. Send your order today . . . enclose the price of each book at 50c or order the entire 3 for \$1.00 (C.O.D. orders filled, plus postage, if desired). After your books arrive, read and examine them . . . then if you are not satisfied return the books within five days and your money will be refunded . . . BUT . . . act at once, as the supply of books is limited and we reserve the right to withdraw this offer at any time.

PICKWICK COMPANY, Dept. 907
73 West 44th Street, New York 18, N. Y.

Send books checked below at once in plain wrapper.

I enclose \$..... (cash or money order).

☐ If C.O.D. preferred, mark X in box, mail coupon and pay postman \$1.00 plus 83c postage.

☐ Send all 3 books.

☐ Send books checked.

☐ The Art of Kissing

☐ True Love Guide

☐ Modern Love Letters

NAME

STREET

CITYZONE.....STATE.....

20% additional for Canada

NOW! An Amazing Opportunity to LEARN RADIO AT HOME

I SEND YOU 8 BIG KITS OF RADIO PARTS
Including a **COMPLETE 6 TUBE SUPER-HETERODYNE RECEIVER**

**I TRAIN YOU
RIGHT by PUTTING
YOU TO WORK with
REAL PROFESSIONAL
EQUIPMENT!**

LEARN HOW TO BUILD CIRCUITS! TEST! REPAIR!
YOU DO OVER 175 INSTRUCTIVE EXPERIMENTS

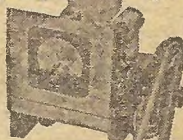


**HERE'S THE EASIEST, MOST PRACTICAL WAY OF ALL TO PREPARE
FOR GOOD PAY IN RADIO ELECTRONICS AND TELEVISION!**

I train your mind by putting you to work with your hands on a big 6-Tube Superheterodyne Receiver. And, believe me, when you get busy with real Radio Parts — 8 big Kits of them — you really LEARN Radio and learn it RIGHT! You get the practical stuff you need to be useful in Radio, and that's what it takes to make money. You don't have to worry about what to do with these 8 Kits of Parts. Step by step, I show you how to build circuits, test, experiment, trouble-shoot. And you don't need any previous experience. The Sprayberry Course starts right at the beginning of Radio! You can't get lost! Simplified lessons, coupled with real "Shop" practice, makes every subject plain and easy to understand and remember. Soon after you begin Sprayberry Training, I'll send you my sensational BUSINESS BUILDERS.

A BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN . . . OR A GOOD RADIO JOB
You'll find out how to get on and do neighborhood Radio repair jobs for nice profits and rich experience while learning. This sort of work can easily pave the way for a Radio Service business of your own. But with Sprayberry Training, you're not limited. You can swing into any one of the swiftly expanding branches of Radio.
Electronics INCLUDING Radio, Television, FM, Radar, Industrial Electronics. Be wise! Decide now to become a fully qualified RADIO - ELECTRONICIAN. Get full details about my Training at once! Mail coupon below for my 2 big FREE Books.

**YOU BUILD THIS USEFUL
TEST EQUIPMENT!**



I give you a fine, moving-coil type Meter Instrument on Jewel Bearings — with parts for a complete Analyzer Circuit Continuity Tester. You learn how to check and correct Receiver defects with professional accuracy and speed.



Soldering, wiring, connecting Radio parts . . . building circuits — you can't beat this method of learning. When you construct this Rectifier and Filter, Resistor and Capacitor Tester, etc., you get a really practical slant on Radio.

You'll get valuable experience and practice building this Signal Generator and multi-purpose Tester. Make a breeze out of fixing Radios and you don't have to spend money on outside, ready-made equipment.

**GET THESE VALUABLE
FREE BOOKS**

"How to Read Radio Diagrams and Symbols"

Here's a valuable and wonderfully complete new book which explains in simple English how to read and understand any Radio Set Diagram. Includes translation of all Radio symbols. Send for this volume at once. It's free!

Along with it, I will send you another Big Free book describing in detail my Radio Electronic Training.

RUSH COUPON!

SPRAYBERRY ACADEMY OF RADIO
F. L. Sprayberry, President, Room 1777, Pueblo, Colorado
Please rush my FREE copies of "How to MAKE MONEY in RADIO, ELECTRONICS and TELEVISION," and "HOW to READ RADIO DIAGRAMS and SYMBOLS."

Name

Age

Address

City

State

(Mail in envelope or paste on penny postcard)

TALK-SING-PLAY

WITH THE SUPER ROLEY THROUGH YOUR OWN

HOME RADIO MIKE!

*Money Back
Guarantee*

ATTACHES TO ANY RADIO

Amaze and mystify your friends by talking about them over your own radio. Create and broadcast shows, commercials and "news flashes". Just flick the button of this professional,

studio-type "mike" and you cut in instantly on any program, make believe you are on with big stars. It's loads of fun, and good-training, too! This professional-looking switch-button "mike" comes complete with long insulated cord. Everything complete, ready to attach in minutes.



Send No Money Examine, use this wonderful microphone at home, without risk. Send no money, just name and address. On arrival pay postman only \$1.98 plus postage, or send \$2.00 with order and save postage. Order Today!

\$1.98

ROLEY SALES CO., Inc., Dept. DA-3
15 Spruce St., New York 7, N. Y.

RUNNING HOT WATER INSTANTLY!

WITH NEW ROLEY INSTANT HOT WATER HEATER



Here's one of the greatest household inventions of all time . . . back again for the first time in many years. Now you can actually have all the hot water you need the instant you need it . . . FROM YOUR COLD WATER FAUCET! This new postwar type heater quickly attaches to any cold water faucet . . . in the basement for extra hot laundry work . . . in the bathroom for bathing needs . . . in the kitchen for dishes, cooking and cleaning. You regulate the temperature and quantity with our faucet handle. Just plug the cord in any electric outlet (AC or DC), turn the faucet and PRESTO — Hot Water, anytime of day, or night, as much and as hot as you want. Easy to install, complete with 6 foot extension cord. Order one or more TODAY.

Hot Water As Fast As It Flows From Your Cold Water Faucet

SEND NO MONEY

Just write today . . . order your Rokey Electric Water Heater and pay the postman \$8.49 plus postage when delivered, or send \$8.49 and we will pay the postage. Try for 5 days and if not completely satisfied return to us and we will gladly refund full purchase price. No C. O. D.s outside U. S. A.

ROLEY SALES CO., INC. Dept. DAH-1
15 Spruce St., New York 7, N. Y.

Lady Godiva RIDES AGAIN



EXAMINE WITHOUT RISK
Send No Money

The effect of this exciting novelty has to be seen to be believed. That's why we invite you to examine it at home, without risk. **SEND NO MONEY** . . . just name and address. On arrival pay postman only \$1.98 plus postage, or enclose \$1.98 with coupon and receive postpaid. You must be tickled pink with this famous 8-inch high pin-up girl and her strange horse, or return in 10 days for full purchase refund. **Order TODAY!**

WHILE HER HORSE DISPENSES CIGARETTES

You'll laugh! You'll howl! You'll be the most amazed person in the world when you see this new side-splitting novelty cigarette dispenser. Here is famous Lady Godiva, painted in natural flesh-colored tones, riding her white horse. When you've finished admiring Lady Godiva's eye-filling pin-up beauty, push the horse's head down. Right before your eyes . . . a cigarette pops out of the horse's tail. Pull the head a dozen times . . . each time another cigarette pops out, without refilling. You'll have a belly-laugh every time and so will your friends and family. Stand it in your den, office or living room and see the sensation it creates. It's almost unbelievable!

**ONLY
\$1.98**

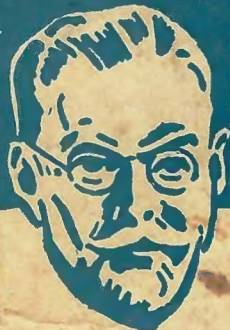
NO-RISK TRIAL COUPON

150 Nassau St., New York 7, N. Y.
5th Ave. Merch. Mart Dept. 60-7

() Rush . . . Lady Godiva's Cigarette Dispensers. On arrival, I will pay postman only \$1.98 each plus postage.
() I enclose \$1.98 for . . . dispensers. You pay postage. In either case I may return in 10 days for refund, if not satisfied.

NAME
ADDRESS
CITY ZONE STATE

HOSPITALIZATION SECURITY



**3c A DAY PLAN
PAYS UP TO**

\$325.00

**HOSPITAL AND SURGICAL
FEES EACH YEAR**

GET OUR FREE OFFER!

Learn how hospital and surgical care is provided for every member of your family in case of sickness or accident. Our Plan permits you to go to any hospital in the U. S.; select your own surgeon.

30,000

Statistics show that 30,000 people at home today will be in a hospital tomorrow. You'll want the best for yourself and family if hospitalization is needed.

Our 3c a day Plan offers the help you need if you act now.



IF YOU'RE SICK TOMORROW
WILL YOU HAVE TO
BORROW?

NEARLY EVERYONE IS ELIGIBLE!

An attractive feature of the Plan we offer is that it is available to almost everyone. Any man or woman under 70 years of age may enroll as a member, and, if married, include wife or husband and all children under 18 years of age as dependents on the same certificate, and no medical examination is required. You may carry as many other policies as you like; we do not limit you.

HERE'S THE PROTECTION WE OFFER YOU!

\$150.00 Hospital Residence	\$120.00 Sanatorium Res.	\$20.00 X-Ray
\$150.00 Surgical Fees	\$300.00 Accidental Death	\$20.00 Operating Room
\$100.00 Maternity	\$20.00 Laboratory	\$20.00 Anesthesia
... Oxygen Tent, Ambulance and others		

No Waiting... No Red Tape

You'll agree our Plan is amazingly liberal, and offers the protection that you and your family need.

FREE Rush Coupon for Details

We want every reader of this magazine to know how easy it is to enjoy the protection we offer... we urge you not to delay but to get the free details at once. Just sign your name to the coupon and mail it to us. You may paste it on the back of a penny postcard if you like. We will send you everything by return mail absolutely free and without obligation. You may act in confidence and no salesman will call. You will only hear from us by mail, so do not hesitate to act at once... a better time than now.



**DETAILS
FREE**

NO
AGENT
WILL
CALL

Rush
Coupon

NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION REQUIRED

INTERSTATE MUTUAL BENEFIT ASS'N.
DEPT 2707 DOVER, DELAWARE

Please send me FREE full details concerning your Hospitalization Policy

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY & ZONE _____

STATE _____